

DEVELOPING A TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERHOOD
FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Herbert Miller, II

B.A., Shaw University, 2005
M.Div., Wake Forest University Divinity School, 2008

Mentors

Sir Walter Mack, Jr., D. Min.
Harry White, D. Min.

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DAYTON, OHIO
December, 2010

**United Theological Seminary
Dayton, Ohio**

**Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

**DEVELOPING A TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERHOOD
FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

by

Herbert Miller, II

United Theological Seminary, 2010

Mentors

Sir Walter Mack, Jr., D.Min.

Harry White, D.Min

Date: _____

Approved:

Faculty Mentors:

Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS.....	4
2. THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL.....	26
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	36
4. METHODOLOGY.....	120
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE.....	124
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION.....	145
APPENDIX	
A. PRE-SURVEY AND POST-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE.....	162
B. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION.....	169
C. INDIVIDUAL EXIT INTERVIEW.....	171
D. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET.....	174
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	180

ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERHOOD
FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

Herbert Miller, II

United Theological Seminary, 2010

Mentors

Sir Walter Mack Jr., D.Min.

Harry White, D.Min.

This program sought to address issues surrounding African American fatherhood. Many fathers struggle in this enterprise. The hypothesis was approaching fatherhood from a biblical perspective would equip African American fathers with the tools to transform themselves into better fathers. To equip the target group, the researcher provided weekly spiritual formation groups, one-on-one discussions, and topical group discussions. At the beginning of the program, four out of seven fathers said they had a good understanding of biblical fatherhood. At the conclusion of the program, seven out of seven participants said they now had a good understanding of biblical fatherhood.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher of this work wishes to thank God in whom all things are possible. In addition, the researcher is forever grateful to the First Baptist Church, Lexington, North Carolina for their undying support and for setting the standard in ministry. The researcher is forever indebted to his family and friends for their continued support and love. A special thanks is extended to the researcher's wife, Veronica Dina Miller. Words cannot express the value of her continued love and support. The completion of this project would have been extremely difficult without her love, patience, and assistance. A special thanks is extended to Herbert III, Wilbert, Faith and Malachi, the children of the researcher, for their patience, understanding and support. Special thanks are also extended to the researcher's mother and father, Herbert Miller Sr. and Brenda Gordon Miller (deceased). Finally, the researcher would like to thank Dr. Sir Walter Mack Jr., Dr. Harry White, and Dr. Carlton Eversley for their guidance and wisdom.

ABBREVIATIONS

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
etc.	et cetera

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One of this work, the researcher outlines his spiritual journey and ministry context. It was his relationship with his father and his struggle to be a father that helped him realize the extent of the difficulties that exist in fatherhood. In Chapter One, the researcher describes how his own experiences are similar to many of the men in his context. The researcher's father struggled in fatherhood because he never had anyone to teach him how to be a father. As a result, the researcher desired to create a program that would equip African American fathers with biblical information that would aid them in becoming better fathers.

In Chapter Two of this work, the researcher begins to identify societal implications of why such a ministry is needed and useful. Some of the social issues that necessitate this ministry focus are: high rates of children who have little or no engagement with their fathers; high rates of single-parent homes; high rates of crime, incarceration, and dropouts, and high rates of woundedness that exists in children *and* fathers as a result of a lack of interaction. The researcher outlines a need for fathers and children to connect, thereby healing wounds that affect every area of their lives. Within Chapter Two, the researcher identifies some of the difficulties of fatherhood and the need of children to have fathers in their lives, but also the innate need of fathers to father.

In Chapter Three, the researcher lays theoretical, historical, theological, and biblical foundations for this ministry focus. The theoretical foundation for this project is developing leadership for effective programming in the postmodern generation. In this chapter the researcher stresses the importance of discovering new ways to express the gospel and reach new people. The researcher stresses discovering ways to reach Eutychus. Eutychus represents those who have fallen by the wayside because the church has not been able to reach them. The African American male is one of these groups. The researcher draws on the likes of Robert M. Franklin and Jawanza Kunjufu as a historical foundation and Origen and Augustine's discussion of God as father as a theological foundation.

In Chapter Four, the researcher outlines the design of the project and the methodology used to implement and measure the results of the program. The hypothesis of the researcher was that exposing African American fathers to biblical instruction and guidance on fatherhood would enhance their ability to be good fathers. The researcher designed a program specifically for this reason. The researcher was curious to see if these men would be interested enough to participate and if said program would indeed increase their knowledge of fatherhood from a biblical perspective, which would in turn enhance relationships with their children. To test the hypothesis and the results of the project, the researcher selected a qualitative methodology. The researcher outlines the goal of qualitative research in this chapter.

In Chapter Five, the researcher details what happened when the program was implemented. The researcher outlined the course of the program and gives a complete data analysis along with the results of the program. The program was deemed successful.

In Chapter Six, the researcher gives an in-depth synopsis and summary of the program. This includes insights, challenges, lessons, surprises, and learning as a result of this program. This program was transformative for the participants and the researcher. The researcher also gives recommendations and suggestion for future exploration of this subject matter.

The researcher details the dire straits African American fathers and their children find themselves in and socio-economic as well as racial factors that contribute to it. The researcher's desire was to determine if the Bible would be an effective tool in helping African American men become better fathers.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

“I told you I was having a boy.” On December 25, 1966, the researcher’s mother uttered these words as she lay in a hospital bed in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. There had been an ongoing debate about the gender of her coming child. She won the gender debate, but no one guessed the child would be born on Christmas day. It was told to the researcher that his mother really did not seem to mind being in the hospital on Christmas day, she was just glad her baby boy had finally arrived.

Being born on this day was a blessing and a curse in the life of the researcher. It was a curse because he would have to share the spotlight on his birthday with the Messiah, in addition to the other distractions prevalent during the holidays. People would often forget it was his birthday because of the busyness of the Christmas season. He struggled with this throughout his childhood. On his sister’s birthday the focus was on her, but on his birthday the focus seemed to be on everything but him. For many years Christmas and his birthday would be combined because they were on the same day. As he grew older he voiced his displeasure to his mother. From that day forward she ensured he received separate Christmas and birthday gifts. Yet, having to share his birthday with Jesus and everyone else in the world just did not seem fair as a child.

Being born on Christmas day was in some ways a curse, but in other ways it was a blessing. It made him feel special, different and unique from most other people. He took pride in being one of very few people to be born on Christmas day. He would often wonder (without realizing at the time that Jesus wasn't really born on December 25), what was so special about him that God would bring him into the world on the same day Jesus was born. It took him many years to realize that he was indeed special, not because he was born on December 25, but because of God's purpose in his life.

The researcher found out early he was gifted intellectually. In school, similar to being born on Christmas day, his intellect was a blessing but also a curse. It was a blessing to be able to excel academically beyond many of his peers. The problem was he was bused into the first school he attended. This was during the early seventies when integration had been mandated and measures were being taken to ensure integration. It was during these years his intellectual ability seemed to become a curse. He found himself frequently being punished because of his academic zeal.

He remembers vividly, sitting near the front of the classroom at Sherwood Forest Elementary School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina waiting with excitement anticipating the teacher giving the class an assignment. She handed out worksheets. As she handed out worksheets she gave instructions for the class not to start until she directed them to do so. The researcher had already finished the assignment by the time the teacher directed them to begin. The teacher moved his desk into the hallway where he did his work in isolation as punishment for failing to follow instructions. He went home and described to his parents what happened but does not remember anything being said or

done about it. He often wonders what the possibilities might have been if his parents had taken a more active role in his educational endeavors.

Because of this experience changes took place in how the researcher operated in the classroom. He gravitated from the front row to the back of the room. He began to take a low profile in classroom activities because he did not want to get in trouble again. He would sit at his desk bored, waiting for the rest of the class to finish an activity or worksheet because his was completed. His zeal for academics waned from that day forward.

The neighborhood he lived in initially was Cambridge Apartments in an African American neighborhood colloquially called "Boston." He and his family were among the first to move into these new apartments. It was a nice new neighborhood.

He credits *some* of what he perceives to be toughness to his experiences in this neighborhood. He soon found out he had to be tough to survive in this community. He participated in numerous arguments, scuffles and fights throughout his childhood. He does not remember winning very many of them because he was usually fighting older kids who were larger and stronger than he was. He had to fight to survive because in this neighborhood you either fought or became a perpetual doormat.

He received his first set of stitches in this neighborhood chasing his sister. She moved out of his way and he somehow hit his head on a trash can rack. Being accosted by bullies was commonplace. He got fed up with one bully. He punched him in his throat in retaliation and thought the boy would die. He never had to worry about being bullied by this young man again. One day, one of the boys in the neighborhood urinated in a cup and threw it in his face. On one fateful day, he was outside playing with the kids in the

neighborhood. He was running and laughing but not watching where he was going. When he turned around he crashed into the side of a brick apartment building. He was riding a friend's bike one day and decided to pop a wheelie. When he did, the front wheel came off. When he came down, the front forks stuck in the ground. He went over the handlebars and landed on his face. He scraped the skin completely off one side of his face and could not open his mouth completely for a week. This was cause for another visit to the emergency room. His experiences in this neighborhood developed a sense of toughness and survival instincts out of necessity.

It was also in this neighborhood that he learned to love sports. The youth in the neighborhood played football on the grassy knoll between two apartment buildings. This grassy knoll soon became hard red dirt scattered with rocks because of the wear and tear of constant sports activities. When the children were not playing football, they played a game called roll-and-bat. The bat was a broom handle and the ball was an old tennis ball. After hitting the ball, the batter would lay the broom handle on the ground perpendicular to the person who caught it and the person would roll the ball in an attempt to hit the broom handle. If the person who caught the ball hit the broom they would get a chance at bat. These are just a few of the countless sports activities, games and competitions the researcher participated in as a child that were foundational to his lifelong participation in sports. These activities occupied the researcher's time in the absence of engagement from his father.

Soon his parents decided the neighborhood was getting too rough and it was time to buy a home. His father was working for R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and his mother worked for Western Electric (Now AT&T). They were considered middle class.

They moved from “Boston” to Ogburn Station, outside the city limits. This was a complete reversal of where they had previously lived. They moved from an all black neighborhood to a ninety-nine percent white neighborhood; from a small apartment to a six-room house; from the city to the country; from hundreds of people in a small apartment complex to a home on almost an acre of land. He had to adjust from living in an urban setting with people who looked like him to living in a rural setting where almost no one looked like him. This was scary for a third grader.

He was surprised to find his new school thoroughly integrated. He matriculated comfortably between African American and Caucasian classmates. He was normally segregated from his African American classmates when the students were separated into different academic groups. There were normally only two or three African Americans in the accelerated groups. At one point he was tested as a gifted child and the teacher recommended that he be placed in gifted classes. He resisted when he contemplated further separation from his African American peers and the possibility of changing schools again. His parents relented. His previous experiences at Sherwood Forest had left devastating scars in his psyche and his interest in academics continued to wane throughout the rest of his years in public school.

He was always able to make passing grades without studying. He made it through high school while taking honors classes and not doing very much studying. The researcher was a hard worker and kept himself busy working along with school and football. He loved football and his participation was marked by his father’s noticeable pride. His senior year he played football, drove a school bus, and worked every night at the trendy New Market Grille restaurant. He would get home at two in the morning, get

back up at six-thirty and start all over again. He did not have much time for studying. He wanted nice things and to be able to do things that cost. His mother had limited financial resources. His father was always reluctant to provide funds for the numerous activities the researcher desired to participate in. Therefore, he decided he needed to work to have and do what he wanted.

One of the things that kept his interest in school was football. He started playing at eight years old and played throughout high school. The researcher believes he was an above average athlete. He always made the first team and was a major contributor. In high school he was the only underclassman to start on offense and helped the team in a failed quest to win a state title. At the end of his senior year a guidance counselor who had ties to Winston-Salem State University notified him that the head coach had requested that he come over to the school and do a workout for him. He was excited about the possibilities of playing college football. He showed up early on a Saturday morning and Coach Bill Hayes, the head coach for Winston-Salem State University, never showed up. He was devastated. He told his father what happened hoping his father would try to help him but this did not happen. At this point he decided playing college football was unattainable. Finally, he decided to work and go to a technical school. His father and mother paid his sister's way to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill but the researcher had to pay his own way to Forsyth Technical College.

As a child, he never had a very good relationship with his father. He believes his father really loved him, but he'd never figured out how to show it. This could have had something to do with the tragic circumstances of his father's family in his father's teenage years.

His father's family served as the caretakers of the local African American cemetery for years. He was the oldest of six children. They experienced a devastating tragedy in their lives at an early age. There was a serious domestic dispute between his father and mother one ill-fated night. The researcher's grandfather shot and killed his mother and took his own life. The researcher's father was the only witness to this tragedy. He was a teenager at the time. He quit school and went to work to provide for himself and his siblings in order to keep the family together. They all ended up living successful and fulfilling lives but his father always seemed to be the one that struggled the most. He and his mother would sometimes discuss that it probably had much to do with internal demons he never dealt with.

The researcher's father was very extroverted and outgoing at times, but introverted at other times. He was a mixed bag. The researcher never really knew what his father was thinking. The two never had any meaningful conversations that he can remember.

His father was brash at times and did not understand the effects of his words. His brashness might not have been so damaging if he had tempered them with words of love and affection. That very rarely, if ever, happened.

The researcher loved to spend time with his father when he was a little boy but these times were sporadic at best. On a few occasions he and his sister would spend time with him in his yellow and black Javelin muscle car. He would sometimes ride on the back of his father's 750 Honda hanging on for dear life as he went around town visiting friends. Once, his father took him to the Farmington drag strip to watch the drag races. He sat a lawn chair on the back of his father's pickup truck and enjoyed the ride. These

were a few occasions the researcher had opportunity to spend quality time with his father. These occurrences were few, sporadic, and eventually nonexistent.

Those times of hanging out were few and far in between. They did not spend much time together. The researcher spent most of his time with his mother, his sister, sports, TV, and reading. When he attempted to spend time with his father or help him around the house, his father would eventually do something or say something that would offend him and push him away. He would help him work on the lawn mower and other projects around the house. If his father asked him to hand him a certain kind of tool to him, and he handed him the wrong one, his father would get upset. His father's favorite word during these episodes was "dummy." The researcher does not think his father realized he was pushing his son away.

He would cut the grass, wash the cars and help around the house, but the researcher and his father continued to grow farther and farther apart. The researcher developed friends in the neighborhood. Every chance he got he was on the basketball court, the football field, or involved in some type of sports activity. He was always very competitive. He is sure that some of this came from his desire for love, affection, and the approval of his father.

His father would come to a few of his football practices. He would come to all or most of his football games, but as soon as the game was over he was gone. He promised him he would take him squirrel hunting. It never happened. He made a few other promises of places he would take him and things they would do together, but these events never materialized. Mostly, his father was either gone hanging out with his friends and drinking buddies or sitting in his recliner watching ESPN or some other sports event.

There were never any questions about how his son's day went. No questions about school. No discussion about what he wanted to do with his life, where he wanted to go to college, what his goals in life were. No encouragement or relationship that a child needs from his father. His father was always the tough-acting, brash, old school father. There were no hugs, kisses or show of affection, just dad.

His father eventually lost his license because of several Driving Under the Influence convictions. Over the years his father had become a functioning alcoholic. He woke up with a beer in his hand; he went to work with a beer in his hand; he had a beer for lunch and another when he got off work. He showed up at the house with a twelve-pack under his arm, and slept with a beer beside his bed. After almost thirty years working at R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, it finally cost him his job.

The researcher's mother was the antithesis of his father. His father was hard, brash and tough. His mother was one of the sweetest and most caring people anyone would ever meet. She was always careful to demonstrate her love and affection for the researcher and his sister, along with others. She did not mind apologizing when she was wrong, but also did not mind telling you when you were wrong, though she always tried to do it in a loving way. She had imperfections, but her love, her genuine concern for people, and her desire to do the right thing far outweighed her imperfections.

The researcher's introduction to God and the Church came through his mother. While he and his sister were fairly young their mother decided they needed to go to church. He remembers visiting a few churches until his mother settled on Mt. Olive Baptist Church in the city. She became a Christian and the researcher, his mother and sister became an integral part of the ministries of the church. They attended church every

Sunday and every Wednesday for Bible Study. They sang on the youth choir that his mother directed and they worked together on various fundraisers and events. His mother also taught their Sunday school class. She made sure they were raised in the church where they could be taught about God.

She taught her children what it meant to be Christians. She did not teach just with words, but through the way she lived. She demonstrated how to love; how to live; how to forgive, and how to treat people. She would never turn a person away that needed her help, even when she did not have much more than they did.

It seems that she always struggled financially. Part of this can be attributed to poor money management. The other part was his father made much more money than she did, but the bills were not divided according to their salaries. His father always had disposable income while his mother did not. She paid her share of the bills, but she also bought groceries for the house, the clothes the researcher and his sister wore, and most of the different fees and cost associated with church, school and extracurricular activities. When his father did give him money for clothes or some other item of necessity, the researcher it was like pulling teeth. He would have to ask three or four times for whatever it was, even if his father had already agreed to give it to him. The researcher believes this was the foundation of his working two jobs his senior year in high school. He grew weary of begging his father to provide what he needed. He in turn decided he would provide for himself.

The researcher's mother was a giver to a fault at times. The family never had a refrigerator full of food, but if anyone was hungry and did not have, she would share what she had with them. If there were a family in need of clothes, she would give them

some of their clothes. The researcher remembers her giving away one of his twin beds to help his uncle furnish his home. When he questioned her about it, she told him he could only sleep in one bed at a time. One day he asked why she was always helping people and giving people stuff when they were going without themselves. She told him that was what they were supposed to do and the Lord would take care of them. She had a genuine desire to help people any way she could. It was apparent this was gratifying to her.

She loved God. She loved the Church. She loved people. She loved her family. There was nothing she would not do to make sure her family had what they needed and were provided for. There were many times she went without to make sure the children had what they needed.

His mother and father's relationship continued to deteriorate. In the researcher's opinion, they had become little more than glorified roommates. There was only one instance of physical abuse the researcher can remember. Before his family moved from Cambridge Apartments his parents got into an argument. He heard what sounded like a physical altercation. When he entered the room he found his father lying in the floor, semiconscious, with his mother standing over him. It was obvious to him that she was afraid she had seriously hurt him. He regained consciousness quickly and was fine. The researcher never witnessed them physically fight again.

The same cannot be said for verbal abuse. When his parents did argue, his father would use language that, because of its inappropriateness, will not be repeated in this document. He did not seem to be concerned if his children heard or not. The researcher does not remember parents arguing all that much, especially as time progressed. That is indicative of the fact they communicated less and less as the years went on.

The researcher's mother tried on many occasions to get his father to go to church with the family. He might have gone once. He does remember quite vividly though the night his father came to Christ. It was a fall evening and his father was just arriving home. He was acting strange on this particular night. He was having what his mother called DT's, which is short for delirium tremens, symptoms of alcohol withdrawal. He began having hallucinations. He kept saying, "They're coming to get me." The researcher's mother asked him, "Who?" He told her that little demons were coming to get him. He could see them moving around the house. The researcher can remember watching him in the kitchen. He got down on his knees, sobbing with his hands around his wife. She led him in a prayer asking God to forgive him for his sins and asking Jesus to come into his heart. The researcher and his sister could not believe what they were seeing. His mother seemed not to know what to do with herself. His father went through the house searching for all the beer he could find and threw it all in the trash.

The researcher struggles to remember if his father went to the hospital or not. Regardless, it did not last long. In a couple of weeks he was drinking again. Over the years his job made him check into a couple of addiction programs but it never lasted. The researcher's mother was extremely disappointed. It was as if she thought they had a new lease on life through his attempt to stay sober. He went back to things as usual and so did the rest of the family.

While the researcher was still a teenager his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. The doctors operated on her and removed one of her breast. She recovered well and continued on with her life. The cancer returned about five years later. The researcher was then in his early twenties. She had previously lost her job of twenty-six years about a

year after the first occurrence and did not go to the doctor because she no longer had health insurance. The cancer returned and she opted not to have surgery this time.

The researcher vividly remembers witnessing his mother's slow deterioration from the woman he so dearly loved to someone hardly recognizable because of the effects of cancer and chemotherapy. At this time the researcher was living with his parents because of a recent separation and impending divorce from his first wife while working a third shift job. This meant he was able to be in the house, assist her with her needs, and take her to the doctor when he could. She voiced her concerns about the possibility of dying and leaving her son and daughter behind. He assured her they would be just fine. Occasionally, he would read the Bible to her. She made the den into her bedroom. He would lie on the floor in the den and read the Bible to her. She seemed to enjoy it. She said he had a nice voice and it was soothing to her. He read to her on many days as she drifted off to sleep.

During a two-week period his mother's health deteriorated immensely. One morning he arrived home from his third shift job and cars were parked around his home. He parked his car and walked past everyone without saying a word. No one said a word to him either. All of his aunts, uncles, cousins, sister, father and other family members were there. He walked past everyone to the den only to discover his mother had died. He headed for the front door, but his uncles stopped him before he could make his exit. For the first time since the night he saw his father weeping on the kitchen floor, he witnessed an emotional display by his father. His father embraced him, and as they wept in each other's arms, he told him, "Don't worry son. We will be alright." For the first time in what seemed like forever he felt like his father sincerely loved him. This was the first

instance in which he could remember his father initiating an open display of love and affection.

The researcher's family later asked him where he was going when he headed for the door. He told them he did not know, but if he had made it out the door his intention was to run until he could not run anymore.

Time progressed and the researcher continued to live with his father until he felt it was time to move out again. He felt that no matter what he did he could not please his father. He had initially moved back home with his parents because he was going through a divorce and finances were extremely tight. He was doing all the upkeep on his house, paying all the bills, in addition to paying child-support. When he moved back home with his parents, his expenses exceeded his income. After his mother's passing, his financial situation had improved. Living with his father did not work well, and he decided it was time to move back into his own home.

Growing up, the researcher determined he was the black sheep of the family. There were times when he and his sister did not have clothes as nice as others, including family and friends. His mother did not have enough money to purchase the items they wanted and sometimes they needed. There were times when his mother would go over one of his aunt's houses to receive food from her so her family could have food until she got paid. Interestingly enough, his parents made good money. They at least made what everyone else in the family made, but it seemed they had the least of everyone. All of the other families in their extended family seemed to get whatever they desired, but his family always seemed to be in need. When his parents were struggling, everyone else's parents seemed to be doing well. All of his first cousins wore nicer clothes and always

received whatever they wanted for Christmas and birthdays. Some of his cousins even thought they were rich because of the manner in which their parents were able to provide for them.

This is a brief synopsis of the researcher family dynamics. This is important because it is the tenuous relationship of the researcher with his father along with contextual realities at First Baptist Church, Lexington, North Carolina that gave impetus to this project.

When the researcher became an adult he did whatever he wanted to do and did not care what anyone else thought about it. He began to drink and smoke marijuana while he was in high school. After graduation he continued these habits, though he was always able to secure well-paying jobs. He went to work everyday but spent a lot of his free time drinking, smoking, and partying. He started working at Wesley Business Forms in Rural Hall, North Carolina and began to enjoy making money. He continued to receive raises and promotions until he was in one of the highest paid non-management positions in the company. Meanwhile, at the age of twenty-one, he married his high school sweetheart. He would later decide this was the biggest mistake of his life. She was twenty and he was twenty-one. He married her and the couple purchased their first home. The first year of their marriage their first child was born, the researcher's namesake, Herbert Miller, III. Two years later they were blessed with their second child Wilbert Denard Miller, named after his maternal grandfather.

Longevity was not the hallmark of this marriage. Before their second child was born his wife communicated to the researcher she no longer desired to be married. Wilbert was conceived during their separation. Her fraternizing with other men during

the entirety of the marriage made it easy for him to agree with her decision. This was a troubling time for him, though he certainly attributed to the deterioration of the marriage, he felt he had tried his best to make the marriage work. Many tears were shed. As he looks back he realizes he went through some form of depression. His way of dealing with his issues was to drink, smoke and party his way through it. This was his way of numbing the pain, not realizing he was continuing the behavior of his father that was detrimental to his family and life as a child.

As previously stated, he moved in with his parents and moved back out after his mother passed. He slowly began to recover from the pain of the divorce. During this time, he vowed he would never get married again because of his lack of trust in women. He decided to utilize this time to focus on himself and attempt to build a career. It was during this time he began a period of reflection, introspection and healing. He learned to like himself. During this period in his life he began to accept that he was different and unique. As a child, teenager and young adult he rejected being different to fit in with his peers. As an adult who had experienced some of the deepest, heart-wrenching, debilitating pain that a human being can experience, he finally began to embrace his “differentness.” He was slowly arriving at a place of peace in his life. He reflected on who he was, flaws and all, and he was at peace with what he saw. This period of reflection and introspection brought a sense of peace in his life he had never possessed before.

The pain of the divorce finally began to wear off and he began dating again. Though the pain was still there, hovering just beneath the surface. It began to dwindle as the days and months went by. Though he made it succinctly clear to the women he dated that he was not interested in any type of commitment, many of them thought they could

change his mind, though none were successful. Just when he had become comfortable with being single and who he was as a person, he met an attractive vibrant young woman, Veronica Maynard.

Still, he had no desire to be in any type of committed relationship, but something was unique about her. He pursued her, but she would not relent. She would not provide her phone number and refused to call the researcher when he provided his number. He frequented a jazz lounge she worked in as a part time waitress. He flirted with her at every opportunity and sought to impress her by leaving inflated tips to no avail. Unbeknownst to him, while he was on the road working, she was researching him through a friend of his. It was not until later that the researcher discovered she was reluctant to date him because initially she was fearful that he was a drug dealer. She said he was too clean cut and flashed too much money not to be. She thought the only thing he could be was a drug dealer. He was stereotyped again, as he had been many times in his life. What she did not know was he was always clean cut. He considered that to be a part of his identity. He took pride in his appearance. The money he was flashing was bill money. He left most of it with his sister to pay his bills while he was on the road. His friend called her one Friday night when he arrived back in town. The researcher spoke with her over the phone and discovered they had a lot in common and there was a uniqueness she possessed that intrigue him. The three of them went out dancing and the researcher and Veronica have been together ever since.

Shortly after they began dating, his father died of throat cancer. He died two years after his mother. He had been offered a job at his company's headquarters during the previous year. He informed his girlfriend (Veronica) he would take the job if his

company offered it again. They offered and he took it. The both of them moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota and lived there for six years. After being together for two years they returned to North Carolina to marry.

It was in Minneapolis that God got the researcher's undivided attention. The researcher moved to Minnesota for a well-paying job, but he realized it was God's way of sending him to a "far country" away from all the distractions of home to get his attention and bring him back to the foundation his mother had laid for him.

The couple went down to Lake Hennepin, a popular destination for the locals, one Sunday morning. On the way home they passed by what they both thought was a school. They discovered later it was a church. This was the first church they visited in Minneapolis. They visited one other church but *something* kept drawing them back to this prairie-home style church. It was in this church, Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, that the God changed their lives forever.

They would reminisce about it often and continue to have fond memories of Minneapolis. It was there they both accepted Christ into their lives and began to work for the Lord. They had both been in church as children, but now the church was in them. After serving at Redeemer for about a year, the church asked the researcher to serve on the Deacon Board. After a year of serving on the Deacon Board the researcher felt God calling him to something different. In March of 1998, he preached his initial sermon at Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church. He preached from the subject, *Be Still and Know That I Am God*, from the 46th Psalm. He wished his mother could see him now. It is the researcher's contention that God used the frozen tundra of Minneapolis, Minnesota to cause him to *Be Still And Know That I Am God*. God removed him from the comfort and

familiarity of his family, his surroundings, and his friends, and sent him to a place where he knew these distractions would be removed. This is what God had been moving them towards their entire lives. God was moving them both toward this single divine encounter that would change their lives.

In May of 1999, the researcher and his wife begrudgingly moved back to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The researcher prefers the term begrudgingly because they never intended to return, but God had other plans. After praying and fasting for nine months it was clear to them that God's desire was for them to return home. He initially thought it was to be closer to his two sons from his previous marriage. That may have been part of the plan, but God's plan was much larger than his.

The researcher called an old friend and former teammate from high school, Dr. Sir Walter Mack, Jr. He and Dr. Mack had known each other since they were about ten years old. They had played football beside each other in high school. They had attempted to stay in touch. He gave him a call to let him know he was moving back to North Carolina. It was then that Mack, a pastor for almost ten years by then, notified him that he was considering taking a call as pastor of Union Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. This was also a part of God's plan. God worked it out where he was present at Mack's last sermon at his church in Oxford, North Carolina and at his first sermon at Union Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He and his wife spent the summer visiting churches but it was apparent that God was leading them to unite with Union Baptist Church.

He began working with Dr. Mack and eventually became his assistant. Being associated with Union Baptist Church afforded him many opportunities and experiences

that many ministers never have the opportunity to experience. He realizes now that God was continuing to prepare him for the journey ahead. Union Baptist Church was a part of that process.

During this time he developed a thirst for knowledge. He read everything he could get his hands on, especially anything dealing with God, the Bible, or the Church. Under the advice of Dr. Mack, he enrolled at Shaw University and earned a BA in Religion & Philosophy. He graduated magna cum laude. God was still preparing him.

In October of 2004, he realized what God had been doing all along. God had been preparing him all along to be a pastor and he never realized it. God called him to the First Baptist Church of Lexington, North Carolina.

During this period, the researcher and his wife were blessed with a beautiful baby boy and girl. Faith is seven. Malachi is six. He feels blessed that God has given him a second chance at fatherhood and family. As a father himself, the researcher realizes the difficulties in fathering. Dealing with his ex-wife as he tried to maintain a relationship with his two firstborn children has been one of those difficulties. There have been many obstacles intentionally placed in his way over the years, he continues to strive to be the father his father never was.

The First Baptist Church of Lexington is located in a town of about 22,000 people. It is mostly an industrial town that was engrossed in the furniture-making industry. A continued loss of jobs and the exodus of young people have ravaged the area. Many jobs have left but very few have entered. The mindset in the area is different from anything the researcher has ever experienced. The congregation is mostly composed of

blue-collar factory workers in lower socio-economic status with a few college-educated and middle-income persons scattered throughout.

During his first year at First Baptist Church he was accepted into Wake Forest University Divinity School. God was still preparing him. He graduated in May 2008. He is currently enrolled at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. God is still preparing him.

The First Baptist Church congregation has grown from about fifty persons to over four hundred persons in six years. This has been done primarily with an emphasis on preaching, teaching, community involvement, building structure and varied programming. While serving First Baptist Lexington, the researcher has discovered an alarming number of persons in the congregation and the community who either do not have a father in their life or have strained relationships with their fathers. The majority of the children in the church and community are raised in single-parent homes with little or no engagement with their fathers. Most, if not all of the fathers in the congregation and in the community struggle daily to succeed at fatherhood. Many of these fathers desire to be successful at fatherhood, but they do not know how. Most of them were raised lacking the steady presence of a father in the home. Many of them who did have a father or father figure in the home were exposed to mutilations of what a father should be. Therefore, they either do not know how to be successful at fatherhood because they have never seen it modeled before them or they repeat the negative models that they have experienced in their own lives. This issue of fatherhood is an area in which the researcher feels passionate about.

The researcher's story clearly displays the dysfunctional nature of the father/son relationship between him and his father. This is an area that has profoundly affected the way in which he does ministry and cares for his family. During the period in his life in which he was able to reflect and introspect he discovered his life had begun to mimic the life of his father in many ways. He had always promised himself that he would never be like his father by repeating those behaviors that negatively affected him as a child. One of those areas was the area of fatherhood. He would retain the positive and discard the negative. He determined he would be a better father to his children than his father was to him. There are many fathers who desire to be better fathers they just need someone to help them along the way. The researcher believes the Bible can adequately serve in this capacity. If the Bible is a guide for our lives, why not use it as a teaching aid to supply fathers with information that will help them grow and mature in the area of fatherhood? In one capacity, the Bible can easily be viewed as the story of a Father's engagement with His children.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

The state of African Americans in the United States is worse than all other ethnic groups in most categories from a statistical perspective. The state of African American fathers are worse. Jawanza Kunjufu believes fatherlessness is the second greatest problem facing America, more acutely African Americans. In his opinion, all the woes of our society have a common thread. If you look at drug addiction, teen pregnancy, illiteracy, grade retention, incarceration, etc., the common thread running through all of them is the absence of a father in the child's life.¹ "In the parlance of social psychology, social work, and urban social scientists, African American fathers have often been described as 'absent,' 'missing,' 'nonresidential,' 'noncustodial,' 'unavailable,' 'nonmarried,' 'irresponsible,' and 'immature.'"² Jawanza Kunjufu, noted author, lecturer, and researcher says again, "In our society fatherhood is becoming more nebulous and difficult to define. We live in a culture where people try to replace fathers with sperm banks, and the state becomes the provider and the protector."³

¹ Jawanza Kunjufu, *Raising Black Boys* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2007), 48.

² Michael E. Conner & Joseph L. White, *Black Fathers: An Invisible Presence In America*, ed. Michael E. Conner & Joseph L. White (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2006), ix.

³ Jawanza Kunjufu, *Restoring The Village, Values, And Commitment: Solutions For The Black Family* (Chicago, Illinois: African American Images, 1996), 62.

Michael E. Conner and Joseph L. White, in *Black Fathers: An Invisible Presence In America* convey that according to demographic data, most African American children growing up in our society do not live in the same household with their biological fathers or they reside with them only periodically. Increasingly, fewer African American fathers live with their children. Statistics tell us that approximately 64% of African American children grow up in one-parent households. According to U.S. Bureau of the Census statistics one half of African American families are headed by single mothers. All ethnic groups have growing concerns because of the increasing numbers of households absent biological or legal fathers. This problem is particularly acute in the African American community.¹

In many housing developments, approximately 93% of the households are single parent households. There are housing developments where there may not be one African American father living in the entire complex. “Unfortunately,” says Jawanza Kunjufu, “we have sons who have never seen their fathers, never seen a Black man work, read, pray, or respect a woman.”² Not only are there sons who may never have witnessed this, we also have daughters who have never witnessed this. As a result, they do not know how to have a healthy relationship with a man because they did not have healthy relationships with their fathers or male figures during their childhood.

Research illustrates the need for sons to have fathers, but there is also an irreplaceable need for girls. When boys grow up without their fathers they turn to guns. Girls who grow up without their fathers turn to having babies. There are African

¹ Michael E. Conner & Joseph L. White, *Black Fathers: An Invisible Presence In America*, ed. Michael E. Conner & Joseph L. White (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2006, 4.

² Kunjufu, *Restoring*, 64.

American girls who have never been hugged or embraced by a man in a nonsexual way. Girls who have never experienced the affection of a father often turn toward other men for the love and affection they did not receive from their fathers.³ The impact of father absence on African American women has long been a concern of the African American community. Fatherless African American women are often described using terms such as, "...troubled, damaged, and struggling with issues of abandonment, insecurity, and self esteem." Some research indicates fatherless women have higher incidents of promiscuity, teen pregnancy, dropout, and delinquency.⁴

Children, male and female, are suffering in growing numbers from the loss of paternal function. Loss of paternal function is detrimental to children and to the country. It is detrimental to the country because it is the root cause of family dissolution in contemporary America. Fatherless children, in turn, are the cause of many of America's societal woes.⁵

There is a strong need in every child to be fathered. The presence of a father provides children the opportunity to interact with the essence of maleness. Many children experience the essence of femaleness, but miss out on the male counterpart. Children need to experience the "voice rhythms and sounds, smells, texture, body size, and the difference between male and female bodies."⁶ The need for fathers is so strong that

³ Kunjufu, *Restoring The Village*, 68.

⁴ Mansa Bilal Mark A. King, "Fathering in Low-Income Black Families," in *The Myth Of The Missing Black Father*, ed. Roberta L. Coles & Charles Green (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 262.

⁵ Frank Ancona, *Crisis In America: Father Absence* (Commack, New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 1998), 9-10.

⁶ Michael E. Conner & Joseph L. White, ed., *Black Fathers: An Invisible Presence in America*, ed. Michael E. Conner & Joseph L. White (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2006), 10.

children sometimes make up imaginary fathers when they do not have one or spend a lot of energy searching for a replacement.⁷

Research has proven there is a link between biological-father involvement and a child's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral well-being.⁸ When the need for fathering is unfulfilled because of father abuse, alcoholism, absentee fathers, or emotional distance between children and their biological, social, or surrogate fathers, it has been proven that children experience an emotional void which they carry into adulthood. In *Father Songs*, a book of stories about African American fathers edited by Gloria Wade-Gayles, prominent male and female authors discuss the affects of negative experiences with their father figures. Many communicated their struggle with emotional emptiness and psychological scars that followed them into adulthood as a result of the unfulfilled need for fathering. The stories of what Conner and White call "unfulfilled fatherneed" follow a similar sequence. As these persons move through adulthood, their feelings of rage, disappointment, and feelings of rejection get supplanted by their need to understand and connect with their fathers.⁹

On the other hand, many children have been wounded even though their fathers reside in the home. Many people have inherited dysfunction transferred from generation to generation. Wounded fathers, who have never been healed of their wounds, in turn wound their children. Out of the waning number of fathers who remain in the home, some wound their children merely by their presence. They are present in the home, yet

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ King, *The Missing Black Father*, 147.

⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

still absent. Their silence is deafening.¹⁰ The children spend an inordinate amount of time attempting to necessitate engagement between themselves and their fathers. We often misunderstand certain behaviors as rebellion, but often the behavior is simply a cry for involvement, for engagement.¹¹

What normally goes without discussion is the fact that the child is not the only one that suffers. When a father is separated from his child, which is what happens in most cases because our societal preference to the mother having custodial rights, the father also struggles. Mothers and children often do not consider this. Mark Bryan, in *The Prodigal Father: Reuniting Fathers With Their Children*, explains the separation of the family from the father's perspective. He says, "What can a man do when he is unable to be with his children and unable to parent them? How does a father make sense of who he is, or the meaning of life, or the aging process without a future with his children? How can he replace the day-to-day love he lost? Without an outlet for their fathering instinct, lost fathers can become emotional amputees. They tell their stories with their silence."¹²

When a complete analysis of men who have been deemed "deadbeat dads" is done, you discover these men are not deadbeat dads for lack of reason. An analysis will reveal these men bear both psychological and physical scars that were derived from their daily interactions in an oppressive environment. These men carry the ugly remnants of their scars throughout their lives and bequeath them to their offspring in terms of

¹⁰ John Eldredge, *Wild At Heart: Discovering The Secret Of A Man's Soul* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 86.

¹¹ Ibid., 88.

¹² Mark Bryan, *The Prodigal Father: Reuniting Fathers With Their Children* (New York, New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997), 48.

emotional distance between fathers and their children.¹³ Much of this behavior is inherited from fathers and transferred to their children, and their children's children, etc., continuing the vicious cycle.

The lack of fathers in the home is representative of the lack of healthy female/male relationships. Robert M. Franklin says in *Crisis In The Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities*, "Healthy relationships that lead to healthy marriages, parenting, children, and families are the building blocks of a healthy society. If our children and families are not well, larger and exceedingly expensive crises in the public arena will result, including higher rates of school delinquency and drop outs, crime, suicide, incarceration, emotional illness, and substance addictions."¹⁴

The Moynihan in his 1965 work, *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action*, argued that the high rate of fatherlessness in African American communities was culturally rooted by the 1960's. He expressed concern that casual sexual relationships that produce births outside marriage are a more-or-less fixed part of African American culture because of their experience of forced impoverishment. Others view the high rate of fatherlessness in poor inner city neighborhoods as a product of social forces that exist.¹⁵ Moynihan claimed he performed an exhaustive check of all the facts and figures on the structure of the African American family. His verdict was the African American family was a "tangle of pathology," because there were too few fathers in these homes.¹⁶

¹³ Conner & White, ed., *Black Fathers*, 15.

¹⁴ Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis In The Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2007), 46.

¹⁵ King, *The Missing Black Father*, 148.

¹⁶ Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *Black Fatherhood: The Guide To Male Parenting* (Los Angeles, California: Middle Passage Press, 1995), 4.

The Moynihan report neglected the fact that three out of four black men were not absent fathers at the time the report was released.¹⁷

Much research, discussion, and action needs to be done in the area of African American fatherhood. To date, resources are sparse at best. A plethora of research has been done on the African American Church, the African American Family, and fatherlessness as a whole, but more needs to be done in the more specific area of African American fatherhood. African American fathers have similar experiences as other fathers, but they also have unique pressures, influences, cultural norms, and socio-political factors men from other cultures do not experience to the same degree. African American fatherhood is not of importance when it comes to the national agenda of the United States. In 1998, there was a historic conference at Morehouse Research Institute at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. This conference came close to placing the issue of father absence on the national agenda. This conference generated a report called, *Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America*.¹⁸

Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America issues a call to action to fathers, churches, civil rights organizations, and other groups to make this issue a priority for the next ten years. The report finds the issue of fathers disengaging from their children to be a worldwide issue and not just American, or African American.¹⁹ Though it affects African Americans in this country at higher rates than others in this country. The following is an excerpt from the report that provides a sense of its contents:

¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸ Ibid., 97.

¹⁹ Ibid., 98.

We fathered together because of our shared concern about the national trend of father absence that is affecting nearly all races and ethnic groups in the United States, and because of our particular concern about father absence in the African American community...

We gathered together because we believe that among the most urgent problems facing the African American community, and the entire nation, is the reality that 70 percent of African American children are born to unmarried mothers, and that at least 80 percent of all African American children can now expect to spend at least a significant part of their childhood years living apart from their fathers...

Although we differ on the relative weight to be given to economic, cultural, and private and public policy factors in shaping the lives of African American fathers, we agree that each of these factors is at work, and that comprehensive strategies are needed to confront the crisis of father absence in the African American community...²⁰

In reference to the church and the spiritual nature of this impending issue, the conference agreed that religious intervention is needed to fight this crisis:

We gathered knowing in our hearts that the estrangement of fathers from their children is wrong, that children need both their fathers and their mothers, and that neither the African-American community, nor the nation as a whole, can truly prosper unless and until we reverse the alarming trend of father absence...

We agree that there are profound spiritual dimensions to this crisis, and that in order to make the way for nurturing relationships between fathers and their children, much healing must be done between fathers and mothers, men and women.²¹

The report implies there is a deeper issue in fathers' absence from the lives of their children. The deeper issue is the preponderance of dysfunctionality that exists between mothers and fathers, men and women. In a majority of cases, the reason fathers are not engaged in the life of their children is because they are not in the home. The reason they are not in the home is because their dysfunctionality, along with the

²⁰ Ibid., 98.

²¹ Ibid., 98-99.

dysfunctionality of the mother, prohibits the two from coming together to form a healthy environment for the child. If the parents could overcome their own relational wounds and the dysfunction that exists between the two, more children would have fathers in the home.

The absence of the father stems from the mother and father's inability to maintain healthy relationships. In addition to that, society sends men confusing and contradicting messages the entirety of their lives. Several binds that are imposed on many males growing up are,

1. Gender: He is raised mostly by his mother and other females such as a grandmother and female teachers. However, he is expected to throw off this female identity by the age of 5 or 6 and replace it with a male identity.
2. Feeling: He is discouraged from expressing feelings like crying and desiring hugs and other forms of physical affection from his mother by a certain age. Yet he is later criticized for not revealing his more vulnerable feelings and needs as an adult.
3. Breadwinner: He is expected to be a reliable, productive economic provider for his family. Yet if he takes this role too seriously, he may be accused of neglecting his children or of not being around them at home.
4. Autonomy: He is expected to be strong and independent and not to depend upon others for help. Unfortunately, this can lead to a denial of his need for others.
5. Health: He is taught to minimize his complaints about physical pain if he is to be a real man. Further, he is taught not to give in to his bodily ills and injuries. Yet if he follows such advice, he may be laying the foundation for chronic illness and early death.²²

There are many hindrances to father's ability to fulfill their roles as fathers. This is just the tip of the iceberg in reference to the confusing messages men are sent throughout society. For those who are nonresidential fathers the confusing message increase exponentially. Even though men receive a plethora of contradicting messages

²² James R. Dudley & Glenn Stone, *Fathering Risk: Helping Nonresidential Fathers* (New York, New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc., 2001), 23.

throughout their lives, they must not use these contradictions as an excuse to abdicate their important responsibilities as fathers.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The theoretical foundation for this work is developing leadership for effective programming in the postmodern generation. Regardless of our religious denominational affiliations, we either have embraced the postmodern era or we are slowly coming to grips with its impending reality. Anyone who is tracking the direction of religious affiliations, denominations, and churches in general will agree that the church, for the most part, has heeded the prevalent necessity to shift with the times. We are now living in a postmodern generation and any church that possesses a serious desire to grow and flourish must make adjustments.

There are numerous definitions for the term postmodern. It has been said that, “Postmodernity is a term used to describe a variety of cultural discourses and worldviews that question foundational and universal truth, elevate the self over the community, and replace universal cultural narratives with particularized, individual accounts.”¹

The foundation for this work focuses on developing effective programming for this new era we discover ourselves in, programming that will captivate the minds and hearts of postmodern congregants in a way that facilitates mental, emotional, and spiritual attachment to Jesus Christ and the local church. If we are able to provide programming

¹ Delman Coates, “Reaching Eutychus: Reflections On Ministering To The Disconnected In The Postmodern Age,” Vol. 1, in *Doing Church: A Practical Guide, By Those Who Do It*, ed. William D. Watley, Ph.D., (Newark , New Jersey: New Seasons Press, 2010), 204.

that is effective in this postmodern generation, it will foster the kind of growth and vibrancy that most churches desire.

Most churches are not growing because they have somehow lost the concept of caring for the needs of people.¹ Their methods have long ago been surpassed by new methods of accomplishing the same task.

The focus of the researcher's peer group implies there a need to modify the way the church has historically discharged programming and ministry. A cutting-edge generation requires a cutting-edge methodology. The essentials of the faith must remain in tact, but our presentation much adapt with the times. People no longer attach themselves to the church and remain there for the entirety of their lives. Due to this environment, the church must compete with a plethora of distractions and detractors that occupy people's lives in an era of multi-tasking, fast-moving, attention-deficient people who have no intention of wasting their time attending a church that no longer maintains relevancy for their lives.

Those who are serious about doing ministry must learn to live with "their ambidextrous calling." It is our obligation to remain faithful to God's unchanging Word on one hand, but on the other hand, learn how to minister in an ever-changing world. Frequently, Christians who are unwilling to live with this tension tend to retreat to one of two extremes. Some churches that say they are afraid of being infected by the world, retreat into isolation. Other churches, afraid of becoming irrelevant, begin to imitate the latest fad. Our model continues to be Jesus. He never lowered his standards. He always

¹ Stan Toler & Alan Nelson, *The Five Star Church: Serving God and His People With Excellence* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1999), 28.

started where people were. He was always contemporary, to the dismay of his religious peers, but never compromised the truth.²

In order for the church to thrive in this postmodern era it must reconfigure its paradigm. M. Scott Peck informs the church that whenever its mental map or paradigm collapses it will often cause depression. They experience this because they are grieving over the loss of something near and dear to them. It is a process by which they learn how to relinquish life, as they have known it, for a new alternative. Alan Roxburgh of *The Terranova Project*, which studies how Christian faith will transform and reconfigure itself in this new postmodern matrix they discover themselves in says, the process of paradigm change typically follows five phases.

1. *Stability, when all is well, we have few questions, and the questions we have are readily answered by our usual prevailing theories.*
2. *Discontinuity, when the old system seems to not be working as well as it used to.*
3. *Disembedding, when we are beginning to determine that the system we currently use is no longer supportable and begin the stages of disconnecting from it.*
4. *Transition, when we are straddling the fence. We have yet to completely breakaway from the old world and yet to completely embrace the new world by transitioning into it completely.*
5. *Reformation, when we decide to fully give the new world an honest try.*³

There are few churches holding on to the manner in which the church has historically done things that are not experiencing some form of instability. Many of them are experiencing discontinuity because they realize the old system is not working as well as it did in the past. More and more are beginning to realize their current system is

² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 55-56.

³ Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco, California, Jossey-Bass, 2001), XIV.

insupportable and are slowly disconnecting from it. Some are in transition and some have been brave enough to move fully into the new world. Those who are not in any of these stages are all but irrelevant or dying organizations, or they are a part of a denomination that has amassed enough wealth, numbers and influence to sustain them for years to come. These too are experiencing a decrease in numbers, though it may not hurt them as quickly because of their size.

Delman Coates describes this scenario in this way. He says, “[Churches] ignore the way in which their methods and approaches to ministry impact those whom God has called the Church to reach. As a consequence, many churches are struggling and others dying because of their inability to reach “the Eutychus generation.”⁴ Eutychus is the young man in Acts 20:7-12 who became overwhelmed by the length of Paul’s discourse and fell out of the window pew he was sitting in. In this postmodern generation, we must not only be concerned with those who remain in the house, we must also be concerned with reaching Eutychus, because Eutychus has needs of his own.

Eutychus is present in all of our churches. Who is Eutychus? First, he consists of the “unchurched,” people who were not raised in the church and have no attachment to the church. Second, Eutychus consists of the “dechurched,” people who were once attached to the church but for various reasons have now detached themselves from the church.⁵ Thirdly, the “churched,” people who remain attached to the church but many of them may be on the verge of falling out of the window. In the culture we live in, rarely does anyone go find Eutychus, revive him and bring him back in the fold.

⁴ Coates, *Reaching Eutychus*, 200-01.

⁵ Ibid., 203.

In view of the fact that in most African American churches women vastly outnumber men in the life of the church, and there is a constant struggle to bring men into the church and keep them there, Eutychus also represents the African American male. If African American males discover the church to be a place that contains programming and ministries designed to assist them with the issues in their lives, the church may be able to increase their numbers within this population.

This is the environment in which the church finds itself. There are more issues prevalent in people's lives than ever before and they are constantly increasing. Many of the struggles such as absentee fathers, high incarceration rates, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, homelessness, sickness and disease, etc. occur on a more frequent basis and at a much earlier age than before. These are just a few of the issues this current generation struggles with and the issues continue to multiply. When people come to the church, they are looking for answers. "What does the church have to say about my existential reality? What does the church, the Bible, Jesus and the Apostles have to say about my current condition?" In this postmodern era "demonstration must accompany proclamation."⁶ In other words, people want you to show them how attending your church can have a positive transformative effect on their lives.

Herein lies the underlying premise that is foundational to this ministry project. Leadership that provides effective programming in the postmodern era involves finding innovative ways for the church to transform people's lives by meeting the needs of its parishioners and surrounding communities. Developing a transformative model of African American fatherhood from a biblical perspective is one particular model that aids the church in doing so. It is an attempt to address the needs of fathers within a

⁶ Ibid., 62.

congregation to discover what biblical fatherhood is and apply it to their own individual situations.

Historical Foundation

The issue of African American fatherhood is not a postmodern cultural phenomenon. It is not the latest fad or topic of discussion that seems to have achieved contemporary notoriety. African American fatherhood has been an issue among African Americans since the day the first slave ship arrived on the shores of the so-called “New World.”

The researcher believes each individual is a conglomeration or a composite of everything they have experienced in their history. It is the presence of these elements that constitute each individual’s makeup. All of the past experiences in people’s lives make them who they are today. The researcher believes you can better understand people once you peruse their history. Then you will understand why they are who they are and why they behave the way they do.

Not only is this true with individuals, it is also true with ethnic groups and gender groups. In order to understand the contemporary plight of the African American male, you must understand the historical ramifications of his experiences in this country. It is impossible to discuss historical ramifications of African Americans without discussing the long-lasting detrimental affects of slavery.

Wallace Charles Smith, in *The Church In The Life Of The Black Family*, says, “Slavery did everything humanly and satanically possible to destroy the black family.”⁷

⁷ William Charles Smith, *The Church In The Life Of The Black Family* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1985), 17.

C. Eric Lincoln poetically stated, “Slavery was a man getting up for a breath of fresh air and winding up on a boat destined for a new world.”⁸ The wicked institution of slavery left indelible effects on the African American father. Since day one the African American father has been humiliated, emasculated, and disempowered. He was ripped from his homeland and his family. Once he arrived on the plantation he was not expected or allowed to assume his role as father. He was mostly used as a breeding stud and was not expected to be a father. His job was to impregnate the female whenever ordered to do so and work the fields. He had no control or power over his family members. The slave master now assumed that role.

Fatherhood was systematically attacked during slavery. Wives and husbands were separated. Children were mercilessly torn away from their parents and sold to complete strangers. The majority of slave masters considered marriage a nuisance to business. Therefore, they discouraged it.⁹ The African American family, and more acutely, the African American father, says Alvin Morrow in *Breaking The Curse Of Willie Lynch*, “...has been destroyed from the kidnapping of the first African.”¹⁰

The African American family experience unimaginable, barbaric and heartless treatment at the hands of slave masters. Yet, somehow the African American family was able to survive. After emancipation, slaves took advantage of their newfound ability to make their marriages legal.¹¹ For decades after slavery, African Americans families

⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁹ Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *Black Fatherhood: The Guide To Male Parenting* (Los Angeles, California: Middle Passage Press, 1995), 2-3.

¹⁰ Alvin Morrow, *Breaking The Curse of Willie Lynch* (Florissant, Missouri: Rising Sun Publications, 2003), 62.

¹¹ Hutchinson, *Black Fatherhood*, 3.

paralleled the rest of America in many ways. Six out of seven African American families in Harlem in 1925 had two parents in the home. The researcher wonders if further research would reveal possible culprits in the expansive decline of fathers in the home. His hypothesis is findings might include social and political practices that are part and parcel of the fabric of American society have greatly contributed to the deterioration of the African American family, along with other deleterious agents.

Whatever the historical underpinnings are, the cohesiveness of African American families has deteriorated tremendously. Jawanza Kunjufu believes “It is now possible that larger numbers of African American children, specifically male, have grown up in households where there has not been one saved male in the household. Many boys have not known a saved, churchgoing male in their extended family, which includes grandfathers, uncles, brothers, nephews, cousins, and mother’s boyfriends.”¹² More and more people are beginning to discover the magnitude of the plight of the African American male in society.¹³

It is difficult to be what society views as a “good father” if you have never witnessed it being modeled for you. It is difficult to be what you have never seen. Jawanza Kunjufu, in his study on why African American men do not attend church, had a group of African American men complete a survey. He found the men in this group had a lack of Christian role models. He decided to go around the room in an open forum to make all the participants aware of this fact. He said no one in the group had ever had a

¹² Jawanza Kunjufu, *Adam! Where Are You?: Why Most Black Men Don't Go To Church* (Chicago, Illinois: Jawanza Kunjufu, 1994), 110.

¹³ Robert M. Franklin, *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting The American Crisis* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1997), 83.

male in their homes that was saved and went to church. One young man stated, “It should be obvious why we’re here. Can you be anything that you have not seen? Can you be a saved Black man if you haven’t seen a saved Black man? If you haven’t seen a Black man tithe, if you haven’t seen a Black man in your house pray, it’s going to be difficult if not impossible to emulate him.”¹⁴

This underscores the importance of Christian men being visible in their communities. There are multitudes of young men who need alternative role models, other than sports figures, rappers and local pimps and pushers. This young man’s statement articulately communicates one of the difficulties of being, or developing, African American fatherhood from a biblical perspective. The sad reality is, the majority of our young boy’s fathers do not live in the home with them. The majority of African American men do not attend church. If this is the case, how are African American men supposed to learn to be biblical fathers? Sadly, most of them learn from negative role models outside the home, which means many of them are being taught lifestyles that diametrically oppose biblical fatherhood.

John Eldredge, in *Wild At Heart: Discovering The Secret Of A Man’s Soul*, reiterates the effects of the lack of role models for boys. “Most men have never been initiated into manhood. They have never had anyone show them how to do it...The failure of so many fathers, the emasculating culture, and the passive church have left men without direction.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 69-70.

¹⁵ Eldredge, *Wild At Heart*, 105.

Contemporarily speaking, there are a myriad of issues confronting the African American male, which in turn directly affects his ability to be what society deems a “good” father. When you peruse these issues you quickly discover that the African American male is in a dire straits.

Mandatory Minimum Sentencing Guidelines and the Crack vs. Powder Law were the main causes of the vast numbers of young black men going to prison over the last thirty year, or so.¹⁶ The institutional prison complex has capitalized off the criminalization and incarceration of millions of African American males.¹⁷ The current trend is for America to continue building new prisons. Young African American males are receiving longer and stiffer sentences and are filling up these prisons at an alarming rate.¹⁸ They are incarcerated for drug crimes at thirteen times the rate of Caucasian men for similar crimes.¹⁹

This Prison Industrial Complex movement has and will continue to have future affects on the African American community. These affects are not limited to just those who are actually serving prison terms.²⁰ Most African American families are affected in some way by this daunting reality.²¹

Demico Boothe paints a picture of these young African American males, most of them from lower socio-economic status, who fill the penal system:

¹⁶ Demico Boothe, *Why Are So Many Black Men In Prison?* (Nashville, Tennessee: Full Surface Publishing, 2007), 21.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹ Ibid., 80.

²⁰ Ibid., 93.

²¹ Ibid., 94.

They don't want to feel they are specifically designated to those lower echelons of the realms of opportunity; so they look at it like the best and most proven way for them to get a piece of the American Dream is to follow the same path of activity that those highly successful individuals who came from their same ghettos and culture did. These role models are not members of their families; they are entertainers who are or were criminals themselves and who are now able to have money, power, and respect partially because of their success in criminal activity as well as in legitimate ventures. The role models of today's Black youth are largely rappers, many of whom are self-professed former drug dealers, gangsters, and pimps that had to use the lessons and/or money that they got in the streets from illegal activity to get into the entertainment field and other entrepreneurial ventures to make themselves legitimate.²²

The majority of African American men serving prison sentences were raised in single-parent homes. This is a consequence of the absence of the father in the life of these young men. There is a correlation between absentee fathers and those who are more likely to end up in prison. "When a parent is incarcerated, the children are more likely to be victims of abuse and negligence. They are also more likely to mirror their parent's behavior and commit a crime themselves someday."²³

Almost seventy percent of African American children are being raised in single-parent homes.²⁴ Drug addiction, teen pregnancy, illiteracy, grade retention, and incarceration all have a common thread running through them, the absence of the father in the life of the child. Jawanza Kunjufu gives statistics he says document the significance of the absence of the father:

²² Ibid., 94-95.

²³ Ibid., 108.

²⁴ Jawanza Kunjufu, *Raising Black Boys* (Chicago: African American Images, 2007), 31.

- Sixty-three percent of youth that commit suicide are from fatherless homes.
- Ninety percent of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes.
- Eighty-five percent of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes.
- Eighty percent of rapists motivated by displaced anger come from fatherless homes.
- Seventy-one percent of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.
- Seventy-five percent of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes.
- Seventy percent of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes.
- Eighty-five percent of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in fatherless homes.
- Eighty-two percent of teenage girls who get pregnant come from fatherless homes.²⁵

This is a painful illustration to fathers and mothers how important it is to maintain healthy relationships for the benefit of the entire family, not just for the mother and father's sake.

Not only is it important for the father to be in the home and be a part of his children's lives, it is important for the father to demonstrate faith for his children. According to Kunjufu, no one affects whether or not children will be converted more than the father. He says, "When a child becomes saved, only 4 percent of their family will give their lives to Christ. When a mother is saved, only 17 percent of her family will give their lives to Christ. When a man is saved, more than 90 percent of his family will give their lives to Christ."²⁶ However the African American male goes, so goes the African American family.

²⁵ Ibid., 49.

²⁶ Ibid., 55.

The Biblical Foundation

The biblical foundation for this project is 2 Samuel 18:19-33 and Luke 15:11-32.

In these texts, there are two examples. You will find David whose life resembles a postmodern father because his many distractions and busy lifestyle prevents keep him from engaging his children. Secondly, you will find the father of the two lost sons, who works extremely hard, despite cultural ramifications, to be the best father he can. He also reflects a postmodern father because a postmodern father breaks the cultural boundaries to initiate engagement with his children.

Postmodernism reflects in both fathers. It is reflected in David's self-absorbed life style as many contemporary parents model. These types of parents are too absorbed in their own lives to have fruitful engagement in the lives of their children. It is reflected in the life of the father of the two lost sons by the manner in which he seeks engagement with his sons even when they have transgressed. He constantly moves toward his sons, engaging them, hoping for reconciliation. In doing so, he frequently crossed social boundaries and participates in social taboos to bring reconciliation.

It is clear David struggled with fatherhood. The backdrop for his struggles is found in 2 Samuel 18:19-33. David reflects a negative example of biblical fatherhood. The researcher utilizes this text to detail the sad situation between David and his son Absalom. He then traces David's life in order to determine how David ended up in this situation with Absalom.

An example of a father who serves as a model of godly fatherhood with postmodern tendencies is found in Luke 15.11-32. He does not allow historical understandings of fatherhood to prevent him from stepping outside the norms to engage his sons to bring about reconciliation.

In the 2 Samuel 18.19-33, we find David at a perilous point in his life. He is about to receive news that he does not want to hear. David and his son Absalom have been at war with one another and it has finally come to a fateful end. David's worst fears are about to be realized.

In 2 Samuel 18.19, it sounds as though David is about to receive what sounds like good news:

Then Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, "Let me run, and carry tidings to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the power of his enemies."²⁷

Ahimaaz son of Zadok the Priest requests that Joab allow him to be the one to carry the good news to King David that they have been victorious over his enemies. The last time we saw Ahimaaz he was with Jonathon delivering a message to David that an attack from Absalom was imminent.²⁸ Surely, David will be excited about this news!

Victory has been achieved and Ahimaaz is undoubtedly excited about it. He assumes that David will also be excited about the outcome of the battle. This is news that

²⁷ 2 Samuel 18:19 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

²⁸ Eugene Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 223.

every warrior wants to hear. The Lord has vindicated him because he has delivered him from the Israelite troops who have rebelled against him.²⁹

There are some who believe that Ahimaaz may not have been aware of Absalom's death. That may explain his lack of acknowledging that though victory has been secured, David has lost a son.³⁰

In his excitement, it is apparent that Ahimaaz is forgetting this one important fact in his exuberant celebration and desire to take the king "good" news.

Joab said to him, "You are not to carry tidings today; you may carry tidings another day, but today you shall not do so, because the king's son is dead." Then Joab said to a Cushite, "Go, tell the king, what you have seen." The Cushite bowed before Joab, and ran. Then Ahimaaz son of Zadok said again to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, seeing that you have no reward for the tidings?" "Come what may," he said, "I will run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the Plain, and outran the Cushite.³¹

Joab knows that if he tells Ahimaaz, who has always been loyal to the king, that Absalom has been killed even though David ordered that the boy not be harmed, Ahimaaz will be making an unfavorable report to King David, though he thinks the victory is good news.³² As strange as it may seem to some, despite everything Absalom has done to his father, David ordered his men not to harm his son.³³

²⁹ Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 1024.

³⁰ Gwilym H. Jones, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 226.

³¹ 2 Samuel 18:20-23.

³² P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 and 2 Samuel*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1989), 462.

³³ Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 165.

When a father truly loves his children, no matter what they have done, that love always remains. Even when they have seemingly found their way to the outer and lower dredges of life. The love of a father for his children remains. A father's love for his children is an unconditional love. It is not a love that overlooks faults, is blind to wrongdoings, and accommodates detrimental behavior. Fatherly love address the issues in a child's life, but maintains the capacity to love in spite of all the child may have done wrong. It is a reflection of the love of God for humankind. That is why a mother and father can be in the gallery to witness the execution of their wayward child, and as they prep him and prepare him for his impending punishment for his wrongdoing, can be seen mouthing the words, "I love you." It is an unconditional love that loves no matter what the circumstances. No matter what the circumstances, no father wants to see his child's life taken away.

"But this is a good news/bad news message."³⁴ The good news is Absalom and those who followed him in rebellion against the king have been defeated. The civil war is over and the battle has been won. The bad news is the king's son Absalom, though the king ordered that he not be killed, has indeed dead.

It appears that Joab has some paternal concern for Ahimaaz. Ahimaaz is a priest and has been faithful to David throughout the insurrection. In the next verse Joab calls Ahimaaz, "My son."³⁵ Joab is very aware of David's history. He knows that David has historically shown himself capable of killing whoever brings him bad news in a fit of rage.

³⁴ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 223.

³⁵ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation With Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 307.

Therefore, he prefers to send a foreign Cushite (a black person from Cush, the region south of Egypt),³⁶ to take the risk.³⁷

He also knows that Ahimaaz is the son of Zadok the priest, who is a close associate of Joab. The son of another high-ranking cabinet officer is never sent on a mission where there is high risk involved. This mission is a risky one because the king's son is dead.³⁸

Joab does his best to keep Ahimaaz from delivering the news to the king, because of Absalom's death. Evidently Joab does not want King David to have to hear the bad news from a trusted friend of the family. Eugene Peterson says Joab was practicing self-preservation. He was also looking out for himself, because "a personal messenger would deliver a personal message, and Joab, personally implicated in the bad news part of the message, does not want to be mentioned." So, instead of sending Ahimaaz, he sends the Cushite, who is an outsider, to deliver the news impersonally. He would be more likely to bring an objective battle report, and hopefully Joab's insubordination will not be a part of the report.³⁹ Apparently, he is unaware of the deadly risk involved.⁴⁰

Though the Cushite has embarked upon his journey to the king, Ahimaaz does not give up on his quest to deliver the message of victory to the king. In his loyalty, he has a deep desire to run to David and inform him of the outcome of the battle.⁴¹ The tension in

³⁶ Shimon Bar-Efrat, *The Jewish Study Bible-Second Samuel*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 652.

³⁷ Alter, *The David Story*, 307.

³⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 321.

³⁹ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 223-224.

⁴⁰ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 321.

⁴¹ Ibid.

the story heightens as Ahimaaz refuses to give up. Twice he says, “Come what may,” finally realizing that his resolve to deliver the message entails some risk because of the death of Absalom. No one knows how David will respond, but everyone knows David will not like the news of his son’s death. There is no reward to receive for delivering this message, only the possibility of punishment. Though Joab has told Ahimaaz about the death of Absalom, the danger for the messenger and the lack of reward, Ahimaaz doggedly responds, “Come what may...I will run.”⁴²

Ahimaaz refuses to be restrained by Joab and Joab finally gives Ahimaaz permission by saying simply, “Run.”⁴³ Maybe he relented because he was satisfied that Ahimaaz properly understood the risk involved in being the messenger. Or, perhaps, he believed that the Cushite had such a head start that by the time he arrived, David would have long received the news and Ahimaaz would be out of danger.⁴⁴ Whatever the reason, Joab says, “Run.”

Ahimaaz gets a late start on the Cushite, but evidently is a faster runner and gets there first. Not only is he faster, he takes a longer, but quicker route. The Cushite takes the more direct route, but it takes him through the forest of Ephraim, which takes longer. Ahimaaz “ran by the way of the Plain.” It is the longer route, but it is also the smoother route that goes along the river valley of the Jordan. We get a sense that because Ahimaaz is personally involved in this mission, he carefully thinks out the quickest route. On the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 224.

⁴⁴ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 321.

contrary, the Cushite is just doing his job without personal investment, and obediently follows orders.⁴⁵

Now David was sitting between the two gates. The sentinel went up to the roof of the gate by the wall, and when he looked up, he saw a man running alone. The sentinel shouted and told the king. The king said, "If he is alone, there are tidings in his mouth." He kept coming, and drew near. Then the sentinel saw another man running; and the sentinel called to the gatekeeper and said, "See, another man running alone!" The king said, "He also is bringing tidings." The sentinel said, "I think the running of the first one is like the running of Ahimaaz son of Zadok." The king said, "He is a good man, and comes with good tidings."⁴⁶

The story now shifts to the temporary headquarters of David in Mahanaim.⁴⁷ We find David eagerly waiting for news from the battlefield.⁴⁸ The messengers are on the way. Meanwhile, David must sit and wait until news arrives. There he is "sitting between the two gates." Walled cities in ancient Israel and other cities in the vicinity often had double walls around them. There is an inner and outer gate with a plaza between them.⁴⁹

There is a watchman standing on the roof of the gateway. He looks out toward the horizon and spies an individual running towards the city. The watchman calls down and tells the king what he sees. Because the runner is by himself, he assumes it must be good news. At this point, the watchman sees another man running towards the city. This time he called the gatekeeper, who was responsible for dispersing the news to those who were

⁴⁵ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 224.

⁴⁶ 2 Samuel 18:24-27.

⁴⁷ Youngblood, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1025.

⁴⁸ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 321.

⁴⁹ Alter, *The David Story*, 308.

interested. He notifies the king and the king responds the same way he did before.⁵⁰

Maybe, this is because “a solitary runner is likely to be a courier. Soldiers, whether in retreat or maneuvering, would always travel in groups.”⁵¹ Ahimaaz shows up on the scene:

Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, “All is well!” He prostrated himself before the king with his face to the ground, and said, “Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king.” The king said, “Is it well with the young man Absalom?” Ahimaaz answered, “When Joab sent your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I do not know what it was.” The king said, “Turn aside, and stand here.” So he turned aside and stood still.

Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, “Good tidings for my lord the king! For the Lord has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you.” The king said to the Cushite, “Is it well with the young man Absalom?” The Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man.”⁵²

The Cushite embarked upon his journey first, but it is not the Cushite who arrives first, it is Ahimaaz. “He is faster, more eager, more committed to the cause, more loyal to David, more impressed with the victory.”⁵³

“The two messengers divide the message between them, first the good news and then the bad news: Ahimaaz is first with the good news of the victory; the Cushite follows with the bad news of Absalom’s death.”⁵⁴ Ahimaaz arrives first, and when he

⁵⁰ Youngblood, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 1026.

⁵¹ Alter, *The David Story*, 308.

⁵² 2 Samuel 18.28-32.

⁵³ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 322.

⁵⁴ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 224.

shows up he blurts out, “All is well,”⁵⁵ the common *shalom* greeting⁵⁶, and he goes on to explain to David that they have indeed won the war. When Ahimaaz says, “All is well,” it is “...one word in the Hebrew, *shalom*. That word is the last two syllables of Absalom’s name in Hebrew, *ʿAvshalom*, a link David will reinforce when he nervously asks, “Is it well [*shalom*] with the lad Absalom [*ʿAvshalom*]?”⁵⁷

He does not understand that who won the battle is not David’s foremost concern. David does not even acknowledge the victory. What David wants to know is, “Is Absalom ok?”⁵⁸ “It is as if [David] had not really heard their words at all. They were interested in the plural of the defeated forces; he is concerned about the singular of his son.”⁵⁹

Ahimaaz has pleaded with Joab to allow him to carry the news to king David. His adrenaline and possibly his wit have gotten him there ahead of his counterpart. Joab told him “the king’s son is dead.” He may not know all the details of Absalom’s death, but he does know that the king’s son is dead. When Joab warned him of that, he said, “Come what may...” Now he gets his big chance, and he turns coward and pretends he does not know what happened to Absalom.⁶⁰

He spits out some story about a tumult breaking out and not knowing what happened to Absalom. “This is nearly gibberish, but not because of any corruption of the

⁵⁵ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 322.

⁵⁶ Youngblood, *The Expositor’s Bible*, 1026.

⁵⁷ Alter, *The David Story*, 309.

⁵⁸ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 322.

⁵⁹ Youngblood, *The Expositor’s Bible*, 1026-27.

⁶⁰ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 322.

text. Ahimaaz has been posed a question he does not dare answer, and so he begins to talk nervously and incoherently, ‘and I know not what...’”⁶¹ He evades the question.⁶²

In Walter Brueggemann’s words, “Ahimaaz becomes-both to David and to the narrative-immediately irrelevant, having failed in his high resolve through fear of the rage of the wounded king.”⁶³ He lies and says he does not know the condition of Absalom.

Eugene Peterson defends Ahimaaz’s actions. He says, “Some interpret his shuffling as cowardice, fearing David’s response; after all, he had once killed a messenger of bad news (2 Samuel 1.11-16). But it is more likely that he is simply and compassionately giving the bad news gradually and gently.” He believes Ahimaaz responds with the understanding that David may be the king, but he is still a father. According to Peterson, Ahimaaz is sensitive to the *official* dimensions of his message, but he is also sensitive to the *personal* dimensions of his message.⁶⁴

What a father is or does is inconsequential to the fact that he is still a father. No matter what the situation, a godly father does not lose the inclination to come to the rescue of his children, or keep them out of harm’s way. Even the Presidents of the United States of America struggle with this involuntary reaction in their lives. Most of them are accustomed to criticism and derogatory statements about themselves in the media and the political machine. But as soon as one of those entities attacks one of their children, they come to the rescue, because they are fathers first.

⁶¹ Alter, *The David Story*, 309.

⁶² Bar-Efrat, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 653.

⁶³ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 322.

⁶⁴ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 224.

Following this line of thought, Peterson compares Ahimaaz and the Cushite to a friend and a police officer bringing news of your child's murder. "If asked the question," says Peterson, 'Who would you rather have bring the news of your child's murder, a close friend or a police officer?' we would most certainly choose a friend. Ahimaaz is such a friend." According to him, "The Cushite was the designated messenger of Joab, the 'policeman.'"⁶⁵

Maybe David realized it was unlikely he would be able to extract the information he desired from the incoherent, babbling, nervous Ahimaaz. So, instead of questioning him further, he knows there is a second messenger he can interrogate momentarily.⁶⁶ He tells Ahimaaz to "Turn aside, and stand here" (18.30).

Peterson totally reverses how some see Ahimaaz. He believes Ahimaaz's holding back the truth is compassionate friendship. He continues, "By the time the Cushite arrives with the bad news of Absalom's death, Ahimaaz is already compassionately there, a personal presence at David's side to help absorb the shock of the bad news of Absalom's death."⁶⁷

The Cushite now arrives with a similar message of good news for the king. "He is more brusque than his predecessor. He does not begin with a reassuring 'All is well.' There is no indication of his bowing down before the king. He proceeds quickly to the report of the victory, and though the language of that report approximately parallels

⁶⁵ Ibid, 224.

⁶⁶ Alter, *The David Story*, 309.

⁶⁷ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 224-25.

Ahimaaz's language, it is briefer, and ends with 'against you' instead of the more deferential 'against my lord the king.'"⁶⁸ He thinks the death of Absalom is good news.⁶⁹

Again David ignores the greeting and the good news to get right to the point, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The Cushite, unlike Ahimaaz, is willing to respond truthfully to the king.⁷⁰ He responds confidently and euphemistically⁷¹, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man" (v32).

His response is prompt and clear, no stumbling around with his words. He reports Absalom's death, but even he has enough sense to say it indirectly. He does not mention Absalom by name and does not mention the word "died."⁷² "He blithely assumes that because Absalom was at the head of 'all who have risen against' the king, the news of his death will be welcomed."⁷³ He was not privy to the yearnings of king David's heart. Just like Joab, he assumed war is war. He thinks David will be glad that the leader of those who were attempting to overthrow him is dead.⁷⁴

The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Alter, *The David Story*, 310.

⁶⁹ Bar-Efrat, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 474.

⁷⁰ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 322.

⁷¹ Youngblood, *The Expositor's Bible*, 1027.

⁷² Alter, *The David Story*, 310.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 322.

⁷⁵ 2 Samuel 18:33.

David has finally received the news he so passionately desired. Absalom is dead! “In the light of his obvious concern about his son, David’s reaction to the news of Absalom’s death is totally predictable.”⁷⁶ David publicly mourns his rebellious, but evidently still beloved, child.⁷⁷ He now begins a period of mourning for his son Absalom that continues into the next chapter.⁷⁸ “The death of Absalom is an exposition of love and of war simultaneously.”⁷⁹ But now, the war transitions from the battlefield of life to the battlefield of the heart.

A godly father’s love is one that loves in spite of conditions. A father may not agree with what they are doing in their lives, but loves them nevertheless. A father’s love is not turned on and off like a faucet, but it is more like a spring that wells up inside him. It cannot be turned on or off; it flows independently.

Walter Brueggemann assesses David’s response to the news:

The messenger might expect David to answer again, ‘Do not let this trouble you, that’s the way it is in war’ (11.25). Or we might expect David to kill the messenger, as he also has done before (1.15-16). David, however, does not dismiss in indifference or kill in rage. He ignores the messenger as he ignores the news of victory. In this moment the war is irrelevant. What counts is only Absalom, and he is dead. The one to be treated ‘gently’ is dead. David asks for no details. He does not seek to locate fault. He does not ask how or why his order was ignored. Instead David enters into deep, unrestrained, unguarded grief (v. 33).”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Youngblood, *The Expositor’s Bible*, 1027.

⁷⁷ Marti J. Steussy, *David: Biblical Portraits of Power* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 46.

⁷⁸ Jones, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 226.

⁷⁹ Peterson, *First and Second*, 226.

⁸⁰ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 322-23.

His heart-wrenching words originate from the depths of his gut when the words the Cushite has spoken sink deep into his heart. “David is no stranger to death, no stranger to tears, no stranger to murder, no stranger to disappointment, no stranger to sin. But no event in his life combines all these elements with such intensity, such ferocity, as does the matter of Absalom.”⁸¹ In this moment in his life, he absorbs the reality and pain of sin-sourced suffering.⁸²

David now wants to be alone. Seeking a place of privacy, he makes his way up to the room above the city gateway and can be heard lamenting as he goes...” David’s mournful cry is filled with the pathos of a father’s grieving heart: “If only I had died instead of you.”⁸³ He is distraught and mourns profusely.⁸⁴

The love of a father for his children is such that the father would gladly and quickly exchange places with his children, if it were possible, to relieve them of their suffering. A godly father is a direct reflection of the heavenly father. It was the love of our heavenly father that caused him to move on our behalf when he gladly took our place on the cross to bring salvation and forgiveness to us all.

This is definitely not the first time David has wept over someone’s death. He has wept over the death of a compatriot (3.32), a close friend (1.11-12), and even another of

⁸¹ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 226.

⁸² Ibid., 226.

⁸³ Youngblood, *The Expositor’s Bible*, 1027.

⁸⁴ McKenzie, *King David*, 167.

his sons (13.33, 35-36), but in this scene his grief has no bounds, and here his language is unique.⁸⁵

The importance of David's repetition in this passage has been duly noted:

The extreme possibility of repetition, where the device has a totally dramatic justification as the expression of a kind of mental stammer, is bound to be relatively rare, especially in nondramatic literature, but it does occur occasionally in the Bible, most memorably when David is informed of Absalom's death....The poet-king, who elsewhere responds to the report of death with eloquent elegies, here simply sobs, 'Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son,' repeating 'my son' eight times in two verses [18.33; 19.4].⁸⁶

Many writers have been moved by the words of David here. People like George Gordon, Lord Byron and William Faulkner have incorporated them into some of their writings in some form. When David weeps and calls Absalom "my son," it reflects back to an earlier time in his life story when Saul did the same thing in respect to him. Saul did this while thinking David was attempting to seize the throne of Israel, just like Absalom had tried to do to David.⁸⁷

This may be the most distressed moment of David's life, while simultaneously being his greatest moment. We have seen David grieve before. He grieved over the deaths of Saul and Jonathon (1.17-27). But before David grieved in controlled eloquence. This time is different. It is not a controlled eloquent performance considering those who see him. Here, David is too desperate and hurt to be eloquent. The pain has cut so deep, the only thing David can do is cry out the name of his son.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Youngblood, *The Expositor's Bible*, 1027.

⁸⁶ Alter, *The David Story*, 92.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 1027-28.

⁸⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 323.

In David's cry you hear all the pain and anguish of the past. His cries are full of what could have been but is not; of broken and mutilated dreams; of a life of selfish limitations, and the detriments of pride. The pain of the past cuts too deep to discuss and hurts so until David wraps it all in two little words, "My son." Now, his greatest fear is his reality. Earlier, he referred to Absalom as "the young man." Now that Absalom is dead, he calls him "my son."⁸⁹

In this pericope, we find David at his lowest point, mourning the death of his son Absalom, who was hell-bent on taking his father's kingdom and his life. This scenario generates one overriding question: "How did David and Absalom end up in this agonizing situation; a father and son at war with one another, and Absalom seemingly hell-bent on taking his father's kingdom and possibly his life?"

Sadly, this scenario is not all that uncommon. We live in a time when fathers, sons and daughters are often at war with one another. There are numerous Absaloms in our society who are filled with anger and disgust at their Davids.

The life of David is a clear example of the challenges of fatherhood and how fathers influence the behavior and lives of their children. David is a tactical genius on the battlefield but his ineptitude as a father is clear. To see this clearly one must review what the biblical record tells us about his life and his parental relationship with his children. Again, this story begs the question, how did David and Absalom end up in this tragic situation?

David appears on the scene as Samuel is searching for the new king of Israel. Saul is still in place as the king, but God has rejected him. God instructs Samuel to fill his horn

⁸⁹ Ibid, 323.

with oil and set out to Jesse the Bethlehemite because he has provided a king among Jesse's sons. His assignment is to anoint the one that God communicates to him is the next king. He goes under the pretense of offering a sacrifice. When he arrives, the elders of the city come out to him to find out if he has come in peace. He informs them he has come in peace to offer sacrifices to the Lord. He instructs them to sanctify themselves and come to the sacrifice. "And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice" (1 Sam. 16.5) NRSV).

When they all gather for the sacrifice, the prophet Samuel begins to assess which of Jesse's sons has been chosen by God to be the next king of Israel. The scene unfolds dramatically:

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to him, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here" He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then left and went to Ramah."⁹⁰

⁹⁰ 1 Samuel 16:6-13.

The same Samuel who anointed Saul as king is about to anoint the second king, while the first king is still sitting on the throne.⁹¹ In this scenario, Jesse, David's father, has brought all of his sons to the prophet Samuel, excluding his youngest son David. "Youngest may also mean 'the smallest' and contrasts David with Saul."⁹² For whatever reason, David appears to be nothing more than an afterthought to his father. It appears that Jesse had no intention of allowing David to be considered for the position of king, or even inviting him to the sacrifice. Eugene Peterson calls David a "nonentity" in the Jesse family:

David was virtually a nonentity in the Jesse family, left behind to tend sheep while his seven brothers were off being presented to Samuel at the festivities being held in Bethlehem...It apparently never occurred to father Jesse that David, the 'little brother,' was good for anything other than menial farm work. The choice of David, the most unlikely of the brothers (the family runt?), has entered the Christian imagination as a characteristic mark of God's electing grace. Paul's way of putting it was, "God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (1Corinthians 1.28-29).⁹³

David serves as a reminder to sons and daughters around the world who have been treated as nothing more than an afterthought in the minds of their fathers. God provides us with example after example of desire to use the afterthoughts of this world to accomplish his divine will. Those who are a "nonentity" in the lives of their fathers must realize and cherish the fact specializes in choosing "what is low and despised in the

⁹¹ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 93.

⁹² McKenzie, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 424.

⁹³ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 93.

world...to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of the God” (1 Cor. 1:28-29).

David could have slipped Jesse’s mind since David was always out in the fields tending sheep. “Out of sight, out of mind.” It could have been that Jesse thought David was too young to be considered for the kingship. “By his sheer youth, he has been excluded from consideration, as a kind of male Cinderella left to his domestic chores instead of being invited to the party. But the tending of flocks will have a symbolic implication for the future leader of Israel, and, in the Goliath story, it will also prove to have provided him with skills useful in combat.”⁹⁴ This scenario makes you wonder how much time David and Jesse spent with one another. We see later on in David’s life his children are also in close proximity, but the text never speaks of him having a close relationship with them. In fact, the opposite is implied. Maybe, David’s experiences with his father directly influenced how he treated his children.

David was also not a big person like his brother Eliab, which may have contributed to his being overlooked also. Or, it could have been that Jesse did not include him simply because David was busy, tending the sheep. Whatever the reasoning, David is excluded initially from this process by his father.

Though David has been overlooked and left out of this process by his father, when he arrives God immediately tells Samuel, “This is the one.”⁹⁵

The Israelites and the Philistines end up in a standoff preparing for battle (1 Sam. 17.1-58). The Philistines send out their champion, named Goliath. “Goliath enters the

⁹⁴ Alter, *The David Story*, 97.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 97.

story immense and defiant and arrogant. His stature (over nine feet tall) and outsized weaponry set him apart as larger than life.”⁹⁶ Goliath challenges the Israelites to choose a man to battle him. The nation whose representative loses the battle will be the servants of the other. Goliath hurls insults at the Israel. “David enters the story as a menial shepherd and an unimportant errand boy.”⁹⁷ During this time David was going back and forth between his duties playing the harp for Saul and feeding his father’s sheep at Bethlehem. Meanwhile, David’s three eldest brothers followed Saul to the front lines of war.

One day Jesse, David’s father, sent him with food for his brothers and to check on their welfare. David traveled to the front lines to carry out his father’s wishes. As David was in conversation with his brothers, Goliath came out and issued his challenge again using the same words as before. David took offense to the challenge. “...who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?,” he said (1 Samuel 17.26b).

David and his father did not have a very close relationship, and it also seems that David and his brothers did not have a very close relationship. When Eliab, his eldest brother, heard what he was saying to the men, he became angry with him. He fumed at David, “Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart; for you have come down just to see the battle” (1 Samuel 17.28-29). He believes David has come just to be nosy. For whatever reason, Eliab shows utter disdain for his youngest brother. He likely believes this is a man’s business, and David is but a boy.

⁹⁶ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 96.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 96.

Eliab and David are at odds with one another. Though they witness the same facts, they interpret them much differently. “The same debased imagination that treated Goliath as important treated David as insignificant. Eliab, who was in awe of Goliath, was contemptuous of David; he treated David with withering scorn.”⁹⁸

When Saul heard what David had been saying, he sent for him. When David appears before Saul, he volunteers to fight the giant. Saul attempts to talk David out of it, but it is clear that David is confident in his ability to defeat the giant because of his previous exploits over numerous animals in the wild. Saul relents.

David goes out and defeats the giant with a sling and a few stones. He knocked the giant down with a stone and killed him with his own sword. The Philistines scattered at the sight of their dead champion. From that day forward Saul would not allow David to return to his father’s house, and set him over the army. So, now David’s relationship with his father seems minimal, which may have something to do with him being an old man at this stage of David’s life. He does not seem to have spent much time with him. His relationship with his brothers seems to be tenuous, possibly because of the age difference. To make matters worse, David is removed from his father’s house and placed over Saul’s army, when he is still attempting to grow into a man. Surely, this must have truncated David’s development.

This is how David appears on the scene. He is a rambunctious, cocky, over-confident young man who is thrust into the limelight because of his recent exploits. Immediately, he receives all of the attention that comes to someone in his position. He is

⁹⁸ Ibid, 97-98.

honored across the land. All of the men envy him. Women are falling at his feet. And now the king becomes jealous of him.

From that day forward Saul is out to kill David. He attempted to get him killed in battle; he's attempted to get his men to kill David, but Jonathon interceded on his behalf and Saul relented, temporarily. David spent much time running from Saul and hiding out in the wilderness to avoid being put to death. He has but one goal at this point, to stay alive by evading the wrath of Saul. When you are in the wilderness you do what it takes to survive, whatever that may be. That sometimes does not translate well when you return to civilized life. He is a fugitive and stays on the run, but eventually Saul met his demise. Instead of killing David, he ends up killing himself on the battlefield to escape death at the hands of the Philistines.

David was thrust into the limelight at an early age and given enormous responsibilities. It is possible that his being torn from his father at an early age, being thrust into leadership so quickly, and being a fugitive for most of this time affected his development and may have been the genesis of many of the problems he would experience as a father and a leader.

David marries Michal, Saul's eldest daughter. He acquires two additional wives besides Michal. Soon Michal is no longer in the picture, evidently separated by the ravages of war between her father and her husband. David is anointed king of Judah. The bloodbath continues during the long war between the house of Saul and the house of David, and the house of Saul continued to weaken. During this time David's family grows exponentially:

Sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of

Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom son of Maacah, daughter of King Talmi of Geshur; the fourth, Adonijah son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, of David's wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron."⁹⁹

David was a busy man. In Hebron, he had six children by six different women.

Though David had six wives and six children, he still sent for his first wife Michal who had been married off to Paltiel the son of Laish.¹⁰⁰

The kingdom is consolidated when David is made king over all of Israel in addition to already being king of Judah. David's family grows again in Jerusalem:

In Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron, David took more concubines and wives; and more sons and daughters were born to David. These are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.¹⁰¹

David now has sixteen children. His duties as king and warrior occupy most of his time when he is not making babies. Though it may have been cultural, it was not possible for David to spend quality time with all of his children. It appears he did not spend much time with any of them. His behavior is reminiscent of contemporary fathers who exhibit the same behavior. Once a man fathers so many children, significant engagement with all of them becomes impossibility.

David from time to time demonstrates his low level of maturity. One of these occasions was when he undressed himself and danced before the Lord and before the people, something no self-respecting king would ever do. This is the reason that Michal despised him so. Though it is said that her behavior was the cause of her barrenness.

⁹⁹ 2 Samuel 3:2-5

¹⁰⁰ 2 Samuel 3:13-16

¹⁰¹ 2 Samuel 5:13-15.

In the spring of the year, David's men went out to battle, but David remained at Jerusalem. David was on the roof one afternoon and he saw a woman bathing. She is purifying herself after menstruation, after the passing of the seven days of ritual impurity (Leviticus 15.19).¹⁰² David inquired about her, sent for her, and lay with her. "No explanation is given of his motivation, whether he acted of love, or lust, or because he wanted to reassert his flagging manhood."¹⁰³

Bathsheba later notified David that she was pregnant. "David brings Uriah home on furlough in the hope that he will have intercourse with Bathsheba and the child she is carrying will be thought to be his; ironically, though, it is Uriah's loyalty to David as well as his sense of duty as a soldier that prevents this scheme from succeeding."¹⁰⁴ Uriah, does not even go into the house. He says he cannot do such a thing while his comrades are in the fields of war. David tries to get him drunk, thinking he would then go and lay with his wife, but he does not. David continues to scheme. He sends Uriah back to war with a letter in his hand that instructs Joab to place him on the front lines and leave him defenseless that he may be killed, and Uriah the Hittite was indeed killed. Bathsheba moves in with David, becomes his wife and bears him a son that God takes away as punishment for David's behavior.

¹⁰² McKenzie, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 221.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 221.

¹⁰⁴ *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, Attridge, Harold W., Gen. Ed., Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 2006, 451.

It is clear that David is a man of war and death. He has been transformed from a young shepherd boy into the warring king of Israel. Though God's favor is upon his life, David seems to have become power hungry and self-indulgent. Power and immaturity are not a good mix. This is evident in David's life. He seems to feel like anything he sees that he wants, he should have, no matter what he has to do to get it. He has numerous wives but kills Uriah to cover up his selfish affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11.1-27). David seems to have developed an anything-goes-mentality. Yet, when confronted with his sins, he is quick to admit his guilt before God. Nathan, who calls David out for his sin, informs him what God says about this situation:

Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and give them to your neighbor, and shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.¹⁰⁵

Even though he admits his guilt Nathan also informs him that the child of his and Bathsheba will die, and while all of this is going on his children are somewhere in the wings watching the exploits and the sins of their father of their father.

Another example of David's poor decision-making is in the case of the raping of his daughter Tamar. David's son Amnon lured her into his presence pretending to be sick. He raped his own sister even though she pleaded with him not to. Afterward, he cast her out from his presence. David was angry when he found out, but refused to punish his son Amnon because he was his first-born (2 Sam. 13.1-22).

¹⁰⁵ 2 Samuel 12:11-12.

David is angry but his anger does not amount to anything.¹⁰⁶ He fails his daughter by not coming to her defense in a situation that demanded action. He does not come to her rescue, defend her honor, or even punish Amnon for his actions. What does this tell the other members of the family? How much respect does his family and his subjects lose for him? What validity does that give him to address the wrongs of others? What lesson do they learn from David's inaction?

We are told that the reason for his inaction is his love for Amnon. "The word love strikes a sour note in this setting, for we remember that this episode began with the observation that Amnon loved Tamar (vv. 1, 4). Now we are told that David loved Amnon. What kind of love is this? Amnon's "love" provides impetus for rape; David's "love" is a mask for injustice."¹⁰⁷

The word "love" symbolizes the best that humankind is capable of. Sadly, it is often used to mask violence and excuse indulgence. If Amnon and David's love were tested by the definition of love given to us by Paul in 1 Corinthians, they would both flunk. David's anger is anemic; it leaves Amnon's behavior unpunished and Tamar totally ignored.¹⁰⁸

After this event, we never hear of Tamar mentioned in the Bible, though she is not forgotten.¹⁰⁹ This is the cause of David and Absalom's broken relationship, and Absalom never forgets this scenario. How could he? His reaction to his father's inaction is what

¹⁰⁶ Eugene Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 193.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 193.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 195.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 193.

placed them at odds with one another because Absalom decided to handle it since David refused to.

Because of David's inaction Absalom decides to take matters into his own hands. He has watched his father through the years and he knows how to handle a situation like this. He invited all of David's sons to a feast and had Amnon killed at the feast. David gets "used" in this set-up. Absalom actually uses his father to get Amnon to the sheep-shearing feast where he will kill him. He does this in the same way Amnon used David to get Tamar to make him a meal in order to rape her.¹¹⁰ For Absalom this is the cold, calculating, and strategic carrying out of justice. Since David refuses to right this wrong, Absalom does it himself.

Murder is the worst crime you can commit in most, if not all societies. Absalom carefully premeditates murder. It is probable that Absalom did not feel like a murderer or think of himself as a murderer. He thought he was carrying out needed justice.

This murder plot was conceived as an act of justice. In Amnon's murder, Absalom was avenging the honor of his sister Tamar who had been violated. He was dealing with a situation that his father refused to handle, so he handled it instead. As far as he was concerned, he was doing the right thing. He was forced to use violent means because of David's inaction. "...if King David had been doing his job as both king and father, Absalom would not have been forced by his outraged conscious to kill his brother."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 194-95.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 202-03.

Absalom flees and stays gone for three years. After some trickery by Joab, the king gives orders to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem. Though, when he returned, the king gave orders for him to go to his own house and not to enter into the king's presence (2 Sam. 13.23-14.24). The king refuses to see his son. The return of Absalom does not result in reunion, restoration or reconciliation, but the schism continues.¹¹²

Absalom lived for two years in Jerusalem in close proximity to his father and was never allowed to come into the king's presence. Not once has he been invited into the king's presence. He and king David do not have one conversation in two years, though they are now living in the same city by the king's orders.

"Absalom's praised position with the people in Jerusalem is at variance with the continued shunning he gets from his father. Everybody, it seems, loves Absalom extravagantly, except for his own father. Absalom chafes under David's deliberate and continued refusal to see him."¹¹³ Absalom wants his father to show him some attention, to engage him. The more he desires David's attention, the more David shuns him. The more David shuns him, the angrier he gets.

Absalom could easily be a son in contemporary society. We now have so many Absaloms in our midst. All they desired was engagement and relationship with their father. They act out in ways that appear to be delinquent behavior, but in reality all some of them want is to be in their father's midst.

Eugene Peterson gives insight into the snowballing effects of David's refusal to enact justice on Tamar's behalf and to interact with his children. Says Peterson:

¹¹² Ibid., 199.

¹¹³ Ibid., 200.

Sin feeds sin. The rape of Tamar feeds the murder of Amnon feeds the hardheartedness of David. Absalom responded to Amnon's sin by sinning. Now David responds to Absalom's sin by sinning. Absalom got rid of Amnon by killing him. David gets rid of Absalom by shunning him. David lost his son Amnon because of the sin of Absalom. David loses his son Absalom by his own sin.¹¹⁴

Absalom has remained in seclusion, festering and growing in anger. He stewes in his banishment. He is home, but not really. Being permitted to exist is no life at all. What he really wants from David is a warm embrace of a father for his child. What he really desires is forgiveness and acceptance. He wants his father to love him again. He has food and drink and a house to live in, but that is not enough. He also needs the grace and mercy of his father to make his life complete. Initially, he is glad to be back home, but he realizes this is simply a judicial act. What he needs is not royal legislation; what he needs a father.¹¹⁵

Is not that what every child needs? In this society of single-parent homes and absentee fathers, and delinquent children, children do not need legislation or court battles between parents, as much as they need a father, whether or not the parents are capable of maintaining a healthy relationship.

What a difference it would have made if David's behavior were different? What if David had addressed the wrong done to Tamar when she was raped? What if David had given Absalom the attention he needed and been the father that all of his children needed? What if Absalom had a chance to tell David why he did what he did? David possibly could have regained a son, and Absalom regained a father.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 200.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 201.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 201.

Finally, Absalom gets tired of the situation and sends for Joab that he might go into the king's presence, but Joab refuses to come. Evidently, Absalom does not understand why the king ordered that he be brought back to Jerusalem, but in two years has yet to speak with him. He sent for Joab a second time, but Joab again refused to come. So finally, he did something that his father might have done. He set Joab's fields on fire and this time Joab came. Absalom does not understand why he has been brought there, but has not been able to see the king. "Absalom is not asking for pardon, he is not demanding restoration, he is desperate for a father, no matter what the terms."¹¹⁷ It seems that Absalom is ready to accept a death sentence, as long as it comes from his father. At least he would get the attention from David he so desired. He has grown tired of being ignored.¹¹⁸ When he is taken into the presence of the king, he falls prostrate with his face to the ground and king David kisses him (2 Sam. 14.25-33). Sadly, this is not symbolic of the rest of the story.

David still does not address the wrongs of Absalom and the kiss comes far too late. It has taken too long to come to fruition. By this time Absalom is no longer the Absalom of old. His identity has changed. He is no longer David's son with a desire to be received by his father. Now, he has become David's rival, prepared to take the place of his father.¹¹⁹

If only David had been man enough, or father enough to deal with the wrongs of his children, specifically Absalom in this case. Maybe he would have truncated the events

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 201.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 202.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 202.

that are about to unfold. Absalom has lost complete respect for David. Undoubtedly, this has to do with the travesties he has witnessed in his father's life and David's lack of concern and interaction in the lives of his children. David may be a strong warrior but has proven he is a weak father. Not only is he paying the cost, but his children are too.

How many a modern day father could have eliminated negative events that have unfolded in the lives of their children by simply being involved in their children's lives? How many of children have lost respect for their fathers because of the lifestyles of the fathers? Just like David, many of fathers have the strong warrior façade, but are weak as fathers.

David's inability to handle conflict, his bloodthirsty warring ways, and his unwillingness to discipline his children continue to come back to haunt him. It appears that the murder of Amnon might have been a dressed rehearsal for the murder of his father. There is a "justice vacuum" in the kingdom. People are coming to Jerusalem from all over the kingdom, bringing their complaints and justice needs to the king, as they are supposed to, and the king is nowhere to be found. It is David's responsibility as king to act as judge in matters of justice in the kingdom. At this point in his reign, he is not doing so. He is supposed to protect the weak from exploitation and uphold right against might.¹²⁰

Absalom becomes even more indignant at king David's failure to do his job. He is angry because of the widespread lack of concern for those who are weak and needy in the kingdom, and the growing injustice that exists in the city. Not only has David proved inept at handling matters of justice in his own family, he is also inept at handling matters

¹²⁰ Ibid., 203.

of justice in the kingdom. Absalom believes he would never allow the kingdom to degenerate this way if he were king. “If only I were judge in the land! Then all who had a suit or cause might come to me, and I would give them justice” (15.4).¹²¹ When he speaks of justice for the kingdom, it also includes justice for his sister Tamar and justice for him who was carrying out justice on behalf of one who had been wronged.

After a four-year period of plotting, Absalom announces he is the new king. There is only one problem; David is still the king. Now Absalom begins to publicly challenge his father’s authority and ability to execute justice. David does what David knows how to do. He runs for his life. Back into the wilderness he goes. This is a trying ordeal for David at the hands of his own son. To make matters worse Absalom now does to David, what David has done to others. As a sign of his claim of the throne, he went into his father’s concubines and had intercourse with them in the sight of all of Israel, a blatant sign of disrespect (2 Sam. 15.1-16.23).

Absalom comes looking for his father and is killed by Joab. This brings us back to our foundational text, 2 Samuel 18.19-33. Absalom is dead, even though David has given orders for him not to be killed. David goes into mourning and afterward assumes his kingship again, but it now appears that the people have lost respect for him, whatever respect they had.

David has bequeathed to his children his sporadic, conniving, reckless, bloodthirsty, selfish ways. It seems as though this is a part of his heritage. His family is in constant disarray and David seems unable to correct it.

He even passes on his ways to the next king, who is his son, Solomon. Solomon is known as a man of wisdom but has inherited his father’s ways with women. Solomon

¹²¹ Ibid., 203.

outdoes his father when it comes to women. He amassed seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines, which eventually turned his heart away from the God of his father.

David is reminiscent of one of the challenges that exist in this postmodern generation. In this postmodern era, fathers tend to work longer hours or more than one job. There are a plethora of distractions to divert a father's attention away from his children. Fathers run companies, work to provide for their families, and spend inordinate amounts of time with well-deserved recreational activities. There is not much time left to spend time with the children. But children need their fathers. If postmodern fathers do not seek out ways to include their children in their busy lives, the children's desire for engagement eventually turns to anger. That is why we have a society filled with angry Absaloms.

David serves as a negative example for postmodern fathers. He was too busy running the kingdom, fighting wars, and chasing women to spend time with his children. There were numerous distractions. But David failed to build relationships with his children. He failed to engage them and the family suffered as a result.

The chosen New Testament pericope is Luke 15:11-32. This parable is considered by some to be the best beloved and emotionally the richest one that exists. It moves those who hear it or read it.¹²² This story has become a classic throughout the centuries in Christian circles. It is the centerpiece of this presentation by Luke of God as the merciful father. It is the third parable in a set of three "lost parables" that appear in Luke 15. This third parable is preceded by the parable of the lost sheep (15:4-7) and the parable of the

¹²² Paul Simpson Duke, *The Great Texts: A Preaching Commentary; The Parables* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 88.

lost coin (15.8-10). These first two parables give us somewhat of a framework that can be used to interpret the third parable. They are different stories but make the same point with similar points and meanings. The shepherd lost one out of his ninety-nine sheep. The woman lost one out of her ten coins. They both go out of their way to find what they have lost (15.4,8). When they find their lost possessions, they express joy by celebrating with their friends and their neighbors (15.5,9). Jesus gives an analogy at the end of each parable that relates the finding of the lost possession to the repentance of a lost sinner. When a sinner comes to repentance there is great joy and celebration in heaven (15.7,10). When you follow this pattern you might expect the same theme, of joy and repentance, to be present in the next parable.¹²³ It is also possible to derive that in each of the three parables it is not the lost one but the one who does the reclaiming that calls for the celebration.¹²⁴

Though there are many similarities between the first two parables and this third one, differences abound. Instead of asking a question in this instance, this parable delivers a long and complex narrative. It is more complex because the entire cast is human. Sheep and coins cannot and do not willfully lose themselves, but this wayward son does. It would seem very odd to call the neighbors in to hold a celebration for a lost coin or sheep, but throwing a celebration over a scandalous ungrateful son may be just as surprising.¹²⁵

¹²³ Diane G. Chen, *God As Father in Luke-Acts*, ed. Hemchand Gossai, Vol. 92 (New York, New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 177.

¹²⁴ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 89.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

The Son is the active member of the Godhead in the parable of the lost sheep. The Holy Spirit is the active member in the parable of the lost coin. It is the father who is the dominating member in the parable of the two sons, being mentioned no less than twelve times.¹²⁶

Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, among many others, have attempted to interpret this passage over the years. “The insights these stories contain and reveal concerning the nature of God and God’s conditional love, the way in which God actively searches for the lost children, the acceptance and affirmation of repentant sinners, the impact of salvation on the relationship of persons to other persons (brother/sister to brother/sister), and the wholeness that unconditional love bestows on those who will receive it are nowhere found in as effectively compelling a form as in Luke 15.”¹²⁷

This passage is often called the parable of the Two Lost Sons; it is more commonly called the parable of the Prodigal son. The latter does not do justice to the parable though. The father in this parable does not have one lost son. He has two lost sons. Only one of them has not realized that he is lost.¹²⁸ When it is identified as “the Prodigal Son” it says more about how it is preached in our churches and less about its content. This parable, in similar fashion to the other two parables in this chapter, is known by its negative features instead of its positive features, i.e., the lost sheep instead

¹²⁶ John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Luke: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2005). John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Luke: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2005), 210.

¹²⁷ Samuel Oyin Abogunrin, *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, Edited by William R. Farmer, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 1998, 1416.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

of the found sheep; the lost coin, instead of the found coin; and the prodigal son instead of the loving father. This is done in spite of the fact that each story ends in joyous celebrations.¹²⁹

“This story originally involved three family members, but seldom has the significance of the elder brother been carefully considered. The prodigal, his elder brother, and the father must be kept in full view.”¹³⁰

“By dramatizing a family tragedy, the parable of the Prodigal Son focuses on the crisis of broken relationships between human beings and God. A person living without God is like the younger son running away to a far country.”¹³¹ Yet it is more than just a dramatization of God’s relationship with humankind; it is a story about our relationships with one another. More so, it is about father’s relationship with his children.

This is the story of a father who is generous but sometimes erratic and struggles to be a good father to his somewhat difficult sons. It is a story of kinship. “In fact...the story could quite plausibly be titled, ‘A Dysfunctional Family and its Neighbours.’”¹³²

The collection of the three parables on “lostness” are situated in the context of murmuring and complaining Pharisees and scribes who take issue with Jesus eating in the company of sinners and toll collectors. It is apparent that the Pharisees and scribes would be associated with the elder son who was at home with the father.

¹²⁹ Fred Craddock, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James Luther Mays (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1990), 186.

¹³⁰ Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Interpretation and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 132.

¹³¹ Ibid., 130.

¹³² Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Jesus and His Parables: Interpreting The Parables of Jesus Today*, ed. V. George Shillington (Edinburgh: T&T Clark LTD, 1997), 143.

Throughout this gospel Luke characterizes Pharisees on one hand, and sinners and toll collectors on the other. This would cause his readers to recognize these two groups as opposition and receptivity to Jesus. Diane G. Chen succinctly describes the atmosphere with the Pharisees and scribes on one side and the sinners and toll collectors on the other throughout this gospel:

On one side, the Pharisees and the scribes are depicted as hostile to Jesus (7.30; 11.53-54). They criticize him for breaking the Sabbath (6.2, 7; 14.3-4), being lax in matters of fasting and washing (5.33; 11.38-40), keeping questionable company (5.30; 7.34; 15.1-2), and for forgiving sins, something only God has the prerogative to do (5.21; 7.49). The Lukan Jesus also has harsh words for these people. He indicts the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (12.1), for neglecting justice and love even though on the outside they abide closely to the legal strictures of the law (11.42), and for seeking money, status, and self-justification (11.43, 16.14-15; cf. 18.9-14). The scribes are also accused by Jesus of heaping unbearable legal burdens on others but not lifting a finger to help them (11.46, 52). On the other side, toll collectors and sinners are shown to submit to John's baptism of repentance (3.12-13; 7.29). They gather themselves around Jesus, eat with him, and listen to him (5.27-32; 7.34; 15.1-2). While the Lukan stereotype may predispose the reader to view Pharisees and scribes as 'villains' and toll collectors and sinners as 'heroes,' part of the genius of the parable of the father and his lost sons resides in its equalizing effect, for, as we shall see, both groups, while diametrically opposed, are in fact lost sons of the same father and brothers to each other. The only difference is that they are lost in different ways.¹³³

The situation that Jesus is responding to is one in which the Pharisees and the scribes, who are themselves Jews, continue to be unwilling to accept sinners and toll collectors, who also happen to be Jews. This parable is about internal conflict in a Jewish family, which lends itself naturally to the setting in 15.1-2. There is a correspondence between the two lost sons and the two groups before Jesus. The two sons are brothers and so are the Pharisees, the scribes, the sinners, and toll collectors. They are children of the

¹³³ Chen, *God as Father*, 178.

same Father of Israel. The younger son's waywardness is reminiscent of the sinners and the toll collectors. The sinners and the toll collectors were previously "lost" because of their willful transgression of the law. But, now they are "found" in the company of Jesus. That is presuming they are receptive to his call to repentance (cf. 5.29-32).¹³⁴

Likewise, the elder brother's angry response to the father's reception of the younger son is reminiscent of the grumbling Pharisees and scribes. They sincerely think they have always been faithful and obedient to their father. But they are in fact very oblivious to the fact of their own lostness.¹³⁵

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons."¹³⁶

This parable revolves around a father and his relationship with his two sons. It begins and ends with both of them. Traditional interpretations have tended to stress the wrongs of the younger son who ran away, but the elder and younger brothers are equal players in the dramatic scenes of this compelling story of broken relationships in a dysfunctional family. Both of these sons have needs and are lost, but in different ways. So then, this story is a story of a loving father who had two boys, one of them had separated himself from his father's love by doing evil, and one of them by his jealousy over the acceptance of his younger brother. Both of these boys were prodigals because both of them were estranged from their father, and their relationship with him had been broken.¹³⁷ Christian

¹³⁴ Ibid., 178-79.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 179.

¹³⁶ Luke 15:11.

¹³⁷ Young, *The Parables*, 130.

interpretations of this particular parable have tended to emphasize the return of the prodigal rather than the entire family situation.¹³⁸

The value of family relationships is central to this parable, which reaches out to the most irreligious person and to the person who is outwardly pious but remains deficient in true religion.¹³⁹ Churches are full of them. We must remember when reading this story that for the ancient Mediterranean peasants that were present and heard this story, the psychological center of their lives was not the isolated individual, it was the family.¹⁴⁰ This is in diametric opposition to the way things are done in twenty-first century postmodern America. In peasant societies identity is family identity and not individual identity. Any person deemed to be acting outside the family pattern is deeply resented.¹⁴¹ When a person offended the family he offended the entire village. You did not sin just against an individual, or family; you sinned against the entire community and against God:

The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided his property between them.¹⁴²

The enticing lure of faraway places grabbed hold of the younger son’s soul. Maybe he was fed up with the rules, religion, and righteousness of his father and longed to get away from it all. Therefore, he approached his father with his heartless demand.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Ibid., 131.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 130.

¹⁴⁰ Rohrbaugh, *Jesus and His Parables*, 144-45.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Luke 15:12.

¹⁴³ Phillips, *The Gospel of Luke*, 211.

The division of the father's property to his sons is evident at the beginning of the story. For whatever reason, people do not normally recognize that *both* sons receive their inheritance. This is a crucial fact in following the plot of the story and the role of each character in the story. The elder brother receives more than the younger brother. He receives a double portion, which amounts to two-thirds of the wealth the family had accumulated. The younger brother receives only one third of the inheritance. It is possible this fact is the reason the elder brother stands idly by and never attempts to bring reconciliation to a divisive situation occurring in the family. "The elder brother's silence shouts at the first-century audience. He quietly receives his share of the money without involving himself with the issue of broken relationships in his family."¹⁴⁴

According to mishnaic law, a father had the right to execute a will before his death. Apparently, this is what happens in this parable. The Jewish law of inheritance describes for us what happens in the story. It still would have been presumptuous on the part of the younger son to initiate the execution of the will and the division of his father's estate while his father was still alive. This request would have been shocking to the original audience of the parable. The oral law, however, contained provisions that allowed the father to implement his will before he died. In accordance with the law, the father divided his estate between his heirs because of his younger son's request. The dramatic shock effect of the story comes from the fact that the younger son took the initiative to ask his father for the inheritance before his father dies. In essence this son was wishing his father were dead.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Young, *The Parables*, 138.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

In Kenneth E. Bailey's *Poet and Peasant*, he discusses a situation in the Middle East when a son asked his father for his inheritance before the father died. The father was in good health and worked as a physician. "In great anguish" he told his pastor what happened. He said to his pastor, "My son wants me to die!" The father died three months later. When he died, the mother said, "He died that night!" She meant the father had died the night his son asked him for his inheritance. This story possibly gives us some insight into the cultural context of the first century. The Mishnah constantly refers to the death of the father. A request like this one would be like telling the father he wished he were dead. The original audience hearing this story would be in shock. Severe punishment from the father or complete rejection by the father would not be out of the question.¹⁴⁶ Communal rejection would also not be out of the question.

During Jesus' time it was customary for a father to bequeath his possessions to his heirs by drawing up a will. He could also give his possessions as gifts while he was still alive. Normally, the father's property remained under his control as long as he was alive though. Sometimes whatever inheritance had been allotted was given to them before his death. There is a similar practice in India. There, once the youngest son is considered a grown man, any of the other sons can demand their share of the father's property. There are also similar practices in Africa where their traditions governing bestowing property are fairly consistent with Jewish practices.¹⁴⁷

Though the father had bequeathed his property to his heirs while he was still alive, he would retain usufruct rights in order to be able to continue to make use of his

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 143-44.

¹⁴⁷ Abogunrin, *The International Bible Commentary*, 1416.

estate. He would still have a legal right to a certain amount of control of the estate even after the will had been executed. This is why the father was able to give orders to the servants of the estate even after he had assigned each son their inheritance.¹⁴⁸

Again, Brad Young explains this request from a Jewish perspective. He says, “Life experience teaches that even closely knit families sometimes fall apart when the will of a deceased parent is read. The shock of this story, however, strikes the listener at the beginning, when the son asks for his inheritance before his father’s death. These words echo a death wish. The son wants the money more than he desires the life of his father. The request was tantamount to seeking his father’s death.”¹⁴⁹ “It was as if a child said to his parent, ‘Drop dead! I want your money.’”¹⁵⁰ “And the father, without a word, complies. He agrees to be dead.”¹⁵¹ The son no longer needs the father so he goes out to experience the world:

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.¹⁵²

This man’s younger son seems to be a rebel to the core. It is unthinkable that a child would have the audacity to request his inheritance from his father before the father dies. After committing this terrible offense, he makes matters worse. He sells everything and runs away from his father.¹⁵³ Some scholars argue that this story is scandalous, but

¹⁴⁸ Young, *The Parables*, 138-39.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 138.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 140.

¹⁵¹ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 90.

¹⁵² Luke 15:13.

¹⁵³ Young, *The Parables*, 143.

the scandal does not lie so much in this son's request, but more so in the fact that he liquidated the property and squandered it all. Not only was he audacious enough to ask for it, he then had the audacity to throw it all away. The oldest members of the family depended on being supported by the family property for life. Whatever inheritance a son received before their death needed to be managed properly for their sakes. "Either in demanding his inheritance or in dissipating it, most likely in both, the younger son commits a kind of patricide."¹⁵⁴

This boy is reminiscent of the rebel child in Deut 21.20, who was brought before the elders by his parents. The parents said, "This our son is stubborn and rebellious." The younger boy is disobedient and greedy and seeks to get as far away from his father as he can. He is a blatant sinner and continues to defy his father's love. After he has implied that his father should drop dead, he takes the inheritance that he has just received, sells everything for cash, and flees to a far country, as far away from his family as he can. Just that quickly, one third of the family wealth has been liquidated, though the buyers of the land will not be able to take possession of it until the father dies.¹⁵⁵

Personal relationships are shattered in this story when the younger brother requests his inheritance, sells all that he has and leaves home. The silence of the elder brother speaks louder than anything he says. His actions at the end of the parable should not be surprising because he did nothing to try and prevent the breakup of the family. It is apparent there is a crisis in the family when we look at what the younger son says and what the elder son does not say. It seems that the younger son wants his father to die, and

¹⁵⁴ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 90.

¹⁵⁵ Young, *The Parables*, 143.

the elder son remains quiet and receives his double portion of the inheritance, never attempting to bring reconciliation to the family. Neither of them seems interested in building a relationship with one another or with their father. “In the first-century context, such a major family crisis riveted the listener with the shock effect of unusual events.”¹⁵⁶

The elder son receives his share of the inheritance and remains quiet while his younger brother receives his inheritance, and converts it into cash. He takes his money and travels to a faraway country where he can live and do as he desires, out from under the watchful eye of family and friends:

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’”¹⁵⁷

He is vulnerable because of his lack of skill and training. He goes out and lives the life of a playboy, with no permanent way of sustaining it, until all of his money is gone and a famine sweeps through the land.¹⁵⁸ All of his money is gone, along with his fair-weather friends.¹⁵⁹ He no longer has his support base of his family relationships. The famine seems to have been severe enough that it affects everyone in the land and not just the homeless and the poor. Food is lacking. He eventually becomes desperate and realizes

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 137.

¹⁵⁷ Luke 15:14-19.

¹⁵⁸ Young, *The Parables*, 144.

¹⁵⁹ Phillips, *The Gospel of Luke*, 211.

his mistake. His broken relationship with his father has caused him to now be in exile. He is far from home and the environment he has become used to over the years. Evidently, he now begins to miss all the conveniences of his father's life. His wasteful playboy lifestyle has completely depleted his inheritance and he has nothing to fall back on.¹⁶⁰

His situation has rapidly deteriorated from bad to worse since he left his father's house.¹⁶¹ He has been reduced to absolute poverty.¹⁶² First, he squanders everything that he has. Then, to make matters worse, he does the unthinkable for a Jew by hiring himself out to care for pigs.¹⁶³ "It is work no Jew should have, a final defilement of himself (Lev 11/7; Deut 14.8)."¹⁶⁴ "According to Jewish law, he could not have been in a worse state of uncleanness, tending pigs under the servitude of a Gentile master in a pagan territory."¹⁶⁵ Out of his hunger and desperation he joins himself with one of the citizens of that country, probably a non-Jew. The language of the text implies this citizen is wealthy. This citizen has livestock, and the poor come to him for benevolence, even in a time of famine. He tries to ingratiate himself to this citizen by making himself valuable to him and begging for gratuity. He finds himself in a desperate situation.¹⁶⁶

In this parable, Jesus artistically draws a picture of a life with broken relationships. This non-Jew obviously desires to rid himself of the boy. This Gentile

¹⁶⁰ Young, *The Parables*, 144.

¹⁶¹ Chen, *God As Father*, 180.

¹⁶² Young, *The Parables*, 144.

¹⁶³ Chen, *God As Father*, 180.

¹⁶⁴ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 91.

¹⁶⁵ Chen, *God As Father*, 180.

¹⁶⁶ Young, *The Parables*, 144.

sends the boy to feed his pigs, probably realizing the offensive nature of requesting this of a Jew. Jesus builds upon the Jews hearing the story's repugnance for eating swine. The text does not say that anyone gave him anything. The citizen has fodder for the pigs but gives the young Jewish boy nothing. The boy has gotten to a point that he would have gladly "filled his belly" with fodder meant for the pigs.¹⁶⁷ The pods they ate were carob. In rabbinic literature, humans eating carob is associated with severe impoverishment.¹⁶⁸ Only the poor would eat such food.

We are now told "he came to himself." We cannot be absolutely sure what this means. After spending time with swine and ogling their food, has he come to think of himself as a pig? At the very least, he now realizes the desperation of his dire circumstances and he must do something to change them.¹⁶⁹

This younger son finds himself in a situation that no godly and loving father would want his child in. He is at the nadir of his life. If he goes any lower he will likely be dead. This is the fear of a parent, that their child will make costly decisions that will needlessly place them in dire situations.

The younger son's desperate condition now causes him to decide to seek restoration to his father. He now desires restoration and is even willing to pay back what has been lost. He comes to himself out of desperation and realizes he must take responsibility for his wrong. This is no theological revelation for him it is based solely on

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 145.

¹⁶⁸ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 91.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 91.

the condition he now finds himself in.¹⁷⁰ If it were not for the condition many found themselves in, they might have never found Christ. For some people, turning to Christ is not based on some great theological revelation. It is based solely on their desire to remove themselves from the condition they find themselves in. So, they turn to the Father, the One they know has the resources to turn their situation around. This story is not just about the Pharisees and scribes, the sinners and toll collectors; it is also about the humanity's relationship with the Father.

The younger son had committed a long list of moral sins. He had alienated himself from his kinsfolk; being mistreated by his pagan master; he was now on the precipice of starving to death; some would say he was as good as dead. Even the unclean animals that have been entrusted to his care are better off than him. It could be said that he has forfeited his place in his father's house and in the family of Israel.¹⁷¹

“He had done wrong. While he broke the commandments, his greatest sin is his broken relationship with his father, the cause of all wrongdoing in his life. He must go back home and make matters right with his father.”¹⁷²

In this individualistic, materialistic, postmodern world of today, broken relationships with fathers is the cause of much wrongdoing in young people's lives. The difference is many of them have no father to return home to.

In spite of all the wicked things he has done he is still his father's son. The reader is reminded of his son status throughout the narrative. Even as the prodigal weighs his

¹⁷⁰ Young, *The Parables*, 145.

¹⁷¹ Chen, *God As Father*, 180.

¹⁷² Young, *The Parables*, 147.

options, it seems to be the father-son relationship that is the deciding factor in his decision. He is still his father's son.¹⁷³ That is the essence of biblical fatherhood. The child is always the father's child, no matter what mistakes the child makes in their life.

He realizes that in his father's house, even his father's hired servants have enough bread for everyone with some to spare. "In Hebrew, 'bread,' by way of extension, refers to all the physical needs of the person."¹⁷⁴ Therefore, he now begins the long walk home:

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.¹⁷⁵

This is a classic type of parable contrasting the actions of two sons.¹⁷⁶ This first portion of the story develops and unfolds in a beautiful fashion. The youngest son requests his share of his father's property. The father consents to the request. When the son receives his portion, he goes to a "far country" and blows all that he has received. He has fallen into the depths of despair. But finally, he comes to himself. He realizes that the servants in his father's house are in better shape than he is. So, instead of continued

¹⁷³ Chen, *God As Father*, 180-81.

¹⁷⁴ Young, *The Parables*, 147.

¹⁷⁵ Luke 15:11-24.

¹⁷⁶ Young, *The Parables*, 137.

wallowing in this degradation, he decides he will go home and ask his father if he would allow him to work for him to improve his condition.¹⁷⁷

The perspective in the story now shifts to the father. Now, we stand beside the father as he sees him “while he was still far off.”¹⁷⁸ We quickly discover this father may not be the traditional father we expected. This father serves as an example of a postmodern father. He breaks the boundaries of societal norms, expectations and control to communicate to the child that no matter what has happened, he still loves him.

Postmodern fathers do this every day. These fathers continue to break boundaries and reconstruct the contemporary understanding of fatherhood. The modern father worked outside the home and spent a lot of time outside the house. He left the majority of parental relationship to the mother. In postmodernity, fatherhood has been reconstructed and reconfigured. Fathers now assume roles that few fathers would dare in modernity. In this postmodern era, we have stay-at-home dads; women earn more money than their husbands; fathers now fully participate in raising and caring for children; more and more fathers are becoming single parents; the modern identity of fatherhood has slowly faded into the past. Biblical fatherhood is demonstrated through this father because biblical fatherhood calls for the father to do whatever it takes for the benefit of the child, no matter what society thinks or says about it. For a biblical father, there are no boundaries he must stay inside of.

His behavior is totally countercultural. The reaction by the father is astounding. He sees the younger son, runs to meet him, patiently listens to what he has to say, gives him a loving kiss, the finest robe, ring and shoes, and orders a homecoming party to be

¹⁷⁷ Abogunrin, *The International Bible Commentary*, 1416.

¹⁷⁸ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 92.

thrown for this once lost but now found son.¹⁷⁹ “In general, the idea of lostness implies that the lost item, be it a sheep, a coin, or a son, initially belongs to another, so that when it is recovered, the ‘owner’ is glad.”¹⁸⁰ This is absolutely true, but it is also absolutely true that his behavior is shocking, especially in Jesus’ day.

The sonship of this wayward son continues to be confirmed in the father’s joyous response upon his return. When the father catches sight of his son he is filled with compassion. The father discards any concern he has about his dignity and public image. He runs to the son to embrace and kiss him.¹⁸¹ He steps outside cultural norms with reckless abandon. It was not unusual for a mother to run to her child; but this was something fathers did not do. He would have to hike up his long robe allowing everyone to see his flying legs, and look foolish to everyone who witnessed it. Oddly, he behaves in an almost mother-like fashion. His acceptance of his returning son is communicated before a word is spoken.¹⁸² His actions have said enough.

As mentioned before, for a father, this would be shameful. It is shameful because the father’s ankles would show, which no self-respecting father would do. It would also indicate a lack of control. A father did not run to meet or welcome anyone, especially not his children.¹⁸³ The children would have to run to meet him.

This is one of the differences between modern fathers and postmodern fathers. In modernity, there were certain ways a father was expected to behave. In postmodernity,

¹⁷⁹ Abogunrin, *The International Bible Commentary*, 1416.

¹⁸⁰ Chen, *God As Father*, 179.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 181.

¹⁸² Duke, *The Great Texts*, 92.

¹⁸³ Rohrbraugh, *Jesus and His Parables*, 156.

there is no prescribed way in which a father must act. There is no longer certain behavior that is outside the bounds of fatherhood. Postmodern fathers do what it takes to ensure the success of their children and families. If more African American fathers would do as this father does, by disregarding what society thinks, and moving towards their children in order to save them from the dangers of society, the children would reap the benefits.

Paul Simpson Duke gives us a unique perspective on why the father runs to his son:

We should probably see this highly demonstrative welcome as, in part at least, an act of intervention. Members of the community would be hostile to the prodigal for his betrayal of the most basic moral values of the culture. Approaching his former home exposes the young man to cruel insults from onlookers, and perhaps worse. Running to him and publicly embracing and kissing him may well be an act of the father's protection.¹⁸⁴

Kenneth Bailey reiterates this line of thinking.

The father also knows how the village (which certainly has told him he should not have granted the inheritance in the first place) will treat the boy on his arrival. The prodigal will be mocked by a crowd that will gather spontaneously as word flashes across the village telling of his return...he will be subject to taunt songs and many other types of verbal and perhaps physical abuse.¹⁸⁵

To those who are familiar with the familial structure of the village it would be obvious that the father is acting this way because his son is in trouble. His fellow villagers would be angry. It has been argued that the embrace and kiss are not first of all signs of welcome, they are first of all signs of protection.¹⁸⁶ So, maybe the father's behavior is not just disregarding cultural norms. It could be an act of desperation to save

¹⁸⁴ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 92.

¹⁸⁵ Rohrbraugh, *Jesus and His Parables*, 156.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

the life of his child. It was not uncommon for the community to come together and stone a person who had offended their parents or community. Everyone in the village, including this father, would be familiar with Deuteronomy 21.18-21. It says,

If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. They shall say to the elders of his town, "This son of our is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard." Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. So you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel will hear, and be afraid.

Ronald F. Hock has studied selected Greek romances and concludes, "That while the father's unrestrained expression of joyfulness may appear to be unusual, or even undignified, according to Jewish practices, it may be precisely what is expected from the perspective of Luke's Greco-Roman readers."¹⁸⁷

Duke postulates that though there are various ways the father's behavior can be interpreted, God is still presented, as doing what most compassionate fathers would do in this situation. "A loving father's acceptance, forgiveness, and restoration of his child would have been appreciated by any reader of Luke, regardless of his or her Jewish or Greco-Roman contexts."¹⁸⁸

The treatment of the returning younger son exceeds celebration. He showers this traitorous son with outright honor.¹⁸⁹ When the son arrives he begins to recite the eloquent speech he has prepared about becoming a hired servant, but the father does not

¹⁸⁷ Chen, *God as Father*, 182.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 182.

¹⁸⁹ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 89.

allow him to complete it.¹⁹⁰ His attempted confession is cut short. His father begins giving a flurry of orders. He orders the servants to immediately bring his best robe, the signet ring, and some sandals for his son to put on.¹⁹¹ Instead of rebuking his son, he puts a ring on his son's finger and he is restored as a son rather than received as a hired servant. It is probably a signet ring that is placed on the son's finger. If it were, this would give him access to his father's financial resources.¹⁹² The ring signifies the son's authority. The sandals signify the son's freedom, because slaves do not wear shoes. When the father gives the order for the fatted calf to be slaughtered, it indicates the father expects for his son to be treated as an honored guest. Therefore, the party, the music and the dancing serve as public notice that the younger son has been reinstated back into the family and the kinship of Israel. Notice, the father never interrogates the son. He makes no inquiries about what he has done, how he ended up the way he is, or how he can prove that he is truly repentant.¹⁹³

These four gifts from the father to his son-robe, ring, sandals, feast-are meant to communicate the son's honored status. It is meant to communicate it to him, but also to the surrounding community. After seeing this public display, no one should question his full sonship. These acts communicate the son is to be honored by all.¹⁹⁴

The manifestation of the compassion of this father is seen in his willingness to forgive his son and the public outpouring of joy when he returns. This fits well in the

¹⁹⁰ Chen, *God As Father*, 181.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 181.

¹⁹² Young, *The Parables*, 146-47.

¹⁹³ Chen, *God As Father*, 181.

¹⁹⁴ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 92-93.

notion of God as Israel's father in the Old Testament in which God is represented as a father yearning for his rebellious children to turn from their wicked ways and come back to him.¹⁹⁵

Jesus presents this story as a Jewish story that is told in a Jewish context, but persons from the broader Greco-Roman world would also be able to appreciate the message of God's fatherly mercy and forgiveness.¹⁹⁶

This story of the Prodigal Son appropriately follows Jesus' assertion of God's love. Does God really love us? Just like the Prodigal Son, we've rejected him; we too have wandered off into far countries; we too have spent the good gifts that God gave us on our selfish and sometimes sinful pursuits. I wonder what his attitude is towards us now. God is watching us just like the father in the Prodigal Son story. Whenever we decide to return to God, he is waiting and watching for us. When we finally decide to return, he comes out to greet us in his excitement. He stills our confession, and assures us of his unconditional, unchanging love for us. Then he prepares for us abundant life and the fatted calf of transformation.¹⁹⁷

Fred Craddock reverses the way we think about this particular parable. According to Craddock, this is not a parable of a younger son; it is not a parable about an older son; it is a parable about a father.¹⁹⁸ "As in the treatment of all parables, the teacher and the

¹⁹⁵ Chen, *God As Father*, 181.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 181.

¹⁹⁷ Richards, *The Bible Teacher's Commentary*, 685.

¹⁹⁸ Craddock, *Interpretation*, 187.

preacher would do well not to try to explain it; let it stand alone and do its work on and in the hearer. Like an explained joke, an explained parable violates the hearer.”¹⁹⁹

This feels like the end of the story, but it’s not. Now it’s time to hear from the other brother.²⁰⁰

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”²⁰¹

Paul Simpson Duke describes for us the brilliance of this parable’s ability to draw us into the emotional dynamics of the parable:

The father’s pathos and soulful joy in welcoming the younger son easily move us; but then we meet the son who never left and, unless we have been biased by bad preaching, we cannot help identifying with his anger and hurt. The parable’s genius is its capacity to create identification with each character, which means that we experience the story from conflicting perspectives. It is, in other words, as strangely inclusive and encompassing as the astonishing father it presents.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 187.

²⁰⁰ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 93.

²⁰¹ Luke 15:25-32.

²⁰² Duke, *The Great Texts*, 88.

At this point, the oldest brother makes his appearance into the narrative.²⁰³ We meet him on his way home from work.²⁰⁴ He hears all the noise coming from the celebration and wants to know what all the fuss was about. When one of the servants tells him what the celebration is about he becomes angry and refuses to participate in the celebration.²⁰⁵ The father behaves toward the older son exactly as he did to the younger son. Instead of upbraiding his son like a father in that culture might do, he pleads with him to come in and join the celebration. Again, he demonstrates his maternal side because coming out and pleading with his son was as incongruous as running to the other was.²⁰⁶ It would be considered a remarkable scene because old men do not entreat their sons. In contrast, they order them. For them, to beg is demeaning and indicates a lack of shame on their part.²⁰⁷ When his father comes out to ask him to come in and participate, he pleads his case to him. The father responds, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found” (v31-32).²⁰⁸ The father identifies the son as his companion and co-owner of everything he owns. If the father never gave this son a goat, it was because it all belonged to him anyhow.²⁰⁹ Jesus specifically connects the sinner’s

²⁰³ Abogunrin, *The International Bible Commentary*, 1416.

²⁰⁴ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 93.

²⁰⁵ Abogunrin, *The International Bible Commentary*, 1416.

²⁰⁶ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 93.

²⁰⁷ Rohrbaugh, *Jesus and His Parables*, 160.

²⁰⁸ Abogunrin, *The International Bible Commentary*, 1416.

²⁰⁹ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 94.

repentance with being found in the first two parables. Therefore, lostness implies a state of separation from God.²¹⁰

This story does not end with the homecoming celebration of the prodigal son as some might expect. The elder son's response complicates the plot for the hearer.²¹¹ One element that further complicates it is that the character that expresses the objection to the celebration also has objectionable qualities. Now, the story begins to feel more and more like real life.²¹² The elder son reacts in anger, when the father and the readers of Luke most likely expected him to share his father's joy. Because of the similarities in all three stories, it sets the hearers up for this dramatic surprise.²¹³

And why should the elder son not be angry? His brother has betrayed their father, him, and the rest of the family. He has totally squandered a third of the family property, and the portion that remains is his, which now must sustain them all. The father, the younger brother, and the rest of the family will now live on what belongs to the older brother. As a matter of fact, the whole village is eating and drinking on part of it now. He is being robbed of what has been given to him and the little crook that is robbing him has become the toast of the town. His response is one of sabotage.²¹⁴ His is angry and who initially would not be taken aback by this situation?

"The reader who expected (or wanted) the father to give the party for the son who remained home and worked hard feels a jolt which the parable does not relieve with its

²¹⁰ Chen, *God As Father*, 179.

²¹¹ Ibid., 177.

²¹² Duke, *The Great Texts*, 89.

²¹³ Chen, *God As Father*, 177.

²¹⁴ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 93.

simple declaration, 'It was fitting to make merry and be glad' (KJV). Grace seems to abrogate justice, and the parable, with the restraint vital to a parable, leaves the reader to struggle with the tension."²¹⁵

The technique of the storyteller is apparent in the courtyard scene. The father leaves the festive atmosphere to rush outside. When he gets to the courtyard he finds his older son angry refusing to go inside to the celebration being held for his younger brother. On an occasion such as this, the older brother would be expected to be a gracious host. If he had issues with the proceedings, people would at least expect him to pretend that he is happy to see his long lost brother because he had finally found his way back home. Instead of going along with his father's wishes and expressing his frustration later, he allows his anger to get the best of him. His truly feelings came out. When his father arrives in the courtyard, the older brother is fuming with anger. In the courtyard, the father and elder son engage in a heated argument. The listener is left in uncertainty and does not know what happens, but the story does not end there.²¹⁶ It is open-ended.

The curtain abruptly descends on a story left unfinished. It ends with us standing outside a house filled with music, standing in the shoes of an estranged son, considering his choices, and ours, about a festive feast of kinship that is awaiting our arrival.²¹⁷

As usual, Jesus shocks the hearer by the behavior of the players in the story. The audience probably assumes the elder brother will step in and be the mediator in the family. Instead, he plays the part of a greedy hypocrite. The hearer might expect the son's

²¹⁵ Craddock, *Interpretation*, 186-87.

²¹⁶ Young, *The Parables*, 154-55.

²¹⁷ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 95.

pride to cause him to die of starvation rather than be shamed by returning back to his father's house. They also might have expected the father to punish his sons severely for their behavior. Instead the story overwhelms the audience with the compassion of the father. The plot and the reversal of roles capture the attention of the listeners and cause them to embrace the kind of love that only comes from God.²¹⁸

Just like the sheep and the coin in the two previous parables, the younger brother has been lost and there is rejoicing because he has returned. This is where the term “prodigal” son originates. What is not so obvious in the story is the fact that the elder brother is also lost. He should be commended for remaining by his father's side for years. His father readily admits he deserves the inheritance for his faithfulness. His problem is an internal problem. He has developed a form of self-righteousness and it keeps him from being able to see that his father extends his unconditional love to both brothers equally.²¹⁹

This story is not a story of just one sinner. Both of this man's sons can be considered sinners. These two sons represent two kinds of sinners and their sins are very similar in nature. Both of these sons seem to view their father as more of a banker than a parent. The father is the master who has control of the finances. The sons are hired hands who are desirous of more money. When they speak of their relationship with their father, their language reflects work obligations. They look at themselves as hired servants in the home of their master. They are heirs of the father; the younger son desires an unlimited overdraft and the elder son wants a huge savings account along with the notoriety and

²¹⁸ Young, *The Parables*, 140.

²¹⁹ Abogunrin, *The International Bible Commentary*, 1416.

prestige of being wealthy and holding position. They might seem very different on the surface when you compare the way that they go about getting what they desire, they are really very similar in their approaches. The message in this parable is that love is a relationship.²²⁰

That may be one thing that has been lost in postmodern culture. In postmodern culture people are more inclined toward materialism. What we need more than materialism is relationship. Fathers must stress less things and more relationship. It is relationship that deeply affects children and they struggle when they do not have relationship with their fathers. How can you say you truly love your child but do not desire a relationship with them? The modern father's focus was less on relationship and more on providing for the family. In this postmodern culture children desire more. Fathers give them money or things; some father pay support; what the child needs more than anything else is relationship.

When you compare the elder son to the younger son, his lostness is much more subtle.²²¹ He is just as lost as his younger brother, but he is lost in different ways. He has been a good model of doing good and being obedient but has separated himself from his father's love.²²² He has always been by his father's side, as he succinctly puts it, "never disobeyed [his father's] command" (15.29). If that is the case, in what way is he lost?²²³ His conduct is fine by doing those things, but the content of his relationship with his

²²⁰ Young, *The Parables*, 156.

²²¹ Chen, *God As Father*, 183.

²²² Young, *The Parables*, 179-80.

²²³ Chen, *God As Father*, 183.

brother and father is fragmented from the very beginning of this parable.²²⁴ The elder son may not be lost in a literal sense as his brother, yet he is still lost. Just as his brother did, he too has distanced and alienated himself from his father.²²⁵ When he refuses to take part in the celebration and welcome his younger brother back into the family, he fails to emulate his father's mercy and forgiveness.²²⁶

There are many who remain in the Father's house. We should not become indignant when a lost brother or sister finds their way back home. We too, should emulate the Father's love by rolling out the red carpet and celebrating their return. Though it may be easier said than done, those who strive for biblical fatherhood must also do the same thing. Fathers must be willing to demonstrate God's mercy and forgiveness through their relationships with their children.

According to Middle Eastern culture and Jewish traditional values, the elder son would be expected to be the mediator in this type of family crisis. As mediator, the elder son should have sought to bring reconciliation between the father and the younger son.²²⁷

The elder son is lost because of his self-righteousness, lack of mercy and forgiveness, and his refusal to take his rightful place as elder son. You can tell by his speech at the end of the parable that he viewed his father purely from a commercial perspective. His relationship with his father was based solely on his father's finances. When he boasts about his faithfulness to his father, he reveals his true feelings. He speaks of his father as a boss to be obeyed and a banker to be respected. His interest is only in

²²⁴ Young, *The Parables*, 140-41.

²²⁵ Chen, *God As Father*, 179-80.

²²⁶ Ibid., 183.

²²⁷ Young, *The Parables*, 140-41.

the money and his reward he believes he has earned by his hard work. He doesn't seem to have a true love for his father and does not see the needs of his younger brother.²²⁸

The older son is often thought to be right until his younger brother returns home. The elder son may have felt justified in his anger when the celebration occurs upon the younger brother's return. But he was still silent at the beginning of the crisis when he should not have been. Because of his silence and his inaction, he shared the guilt of what had transpired. He did not seize the opportunity to act when he should have. The audience of Jesus' day would have understood his obligation to mediate between his father and his younger sibling.²²⁹

The interpreter of this text *must* take into account the silence of the elder brother. His lack of initiative may well have been influenced by the fact that he knew he was entitled to receive twice as much of the estate as his younger brother. The original audience would have understood the elder son's pretense at the very beginning of the story, long before he humiliated his father at the banquet given for his younger brother.²³⁰

The elder son's issue may not be that of forgiveness. It may be an issue of the perceived injustice of the father from his point of view. When he lets the sinner off the hook, so to speak, the father's actions render the elder son's faithful obedience for all these years a moot point. The elder son has an angry outburst because his good has not been rewarded. His younger brother has done wrong and the wrong appears to not be held accountable, as it should, and even receives preferential treatment over the obedient son. His diligent and persistent obedience goes unrecognized. His undeserving brother has a

²²⁸ Ibid., 141.

²²⁹ Young, *The Parables*, 141.

²³⁰ Ibid., 142.

celebration thrown in his honor after he has wasted his father's money. Therefore, the elder son stays outside and refuses to come into the celebration. He separates himself from his family and his community.²³¹

When he refuses to join in on the feast it publicly shames his father and the son. The father's behavior sends a strong message of acceptance to the community, but the elder son's boycotting the event sends the opposite message. Now, both of these sons have publicly shamed their father and themselves.²³²

The elder son's speech in the outer courtyard gives us clear indication that there are broken relationships in this family. The elder son does not address his father with a title of honor. He fails to acknowledge any familial ties with his younger brother. The pronouns he uses when talking with his father communicate the situation effectively. He refers to the prodigal son as "this son of yours," which places emphasis on his desire to break all ties with his younger brother. He brings up the fact that his father has never thrown a celebration in his honor for him and his friends. He has no desire to participate in the celebration of the restored relationship between his father and brother. The community has come together to rejoice with his father. In direct contrast, he insults his father and the guests by refusing to partake in the festivities. His father tries to convince him to accept his brother back home because he was dead but has come back to them alive and well.²³³ Just as he did with the younger son, the father speaks the final word.²³⁴

²³¹ Chen, *God as Father*, 184.

²³² Duke, *The Great Texts*, 93.

²³³ Young, *The Parables*, 142.

²³⁴ Duke, *The Great Texts*, 94.

“At the end of the parable, the father leaves open the invitation for his elder son to come in. He welcomes him into the house in the same way as he does his younger son.”²³⁵

At every point in this story, the father extends his mercy. His mercy is not contingent upon his children’s performance. It is not contingent upon their willingness or unwillingness to return to him. His mercy is purely grounded in the love of a father for his children.

Mercy must be the hallmark of a father’s relationship with his children. It is mercy that demonstrates a father’s true unconditional love for his children.

The brother’s relationship with each other heavily influenced their relationship with their father. Genuine faith starts by developing a solid relationship with our heavenly father. In every scene in this story, the father is displayed as a compassionate father. He loves his sons but allows them the freedom to make their own decisions. When they eventually make some harmful decisions in their lives, the father is constant, always present and ready to help in a time of crisis. His goal is restoration and healing broken relationships.²³⁶ This can be seen in his position towards his sons. Note it is always the sons who walk away from the father, and not the father walking away from the sons. To the contrary, this father always moves towards his sons. He does so relationally and literally. “He runs toward the returning prodigal, and he steps outside the house to plead with his elder son.”²³⁷ It seems that neither of the sons truly understands him as a loving parent. They view him as their financier; like a personal banker who is responsible for providing the money to supply their every need and to pay their wages. But this parable

²³⁵ Chen, *God As Father*, 184.

²³⁶ Young, *The Parables*, 130-31.

²³⁷ Chen, *God as Father*, 180.

continuously challenges the audience to accept the compassion of this committed father.²³⁸

Likewise, postmodern fathers should always take the same stance as the father in the parable. Regardless of the circumstances; whether the parents are together or not, whether the child lives or has ever lived with the father; whether the child was planned or unplanned; whether the father and mother get along or not, the father should always be trying to move towards his child to reconcile their relationship. The benefits of a father's relationship with his child far outweigh all the intangibles.

The father plays the major role in this parabolic recitation. He allows his sons the freedom to make their own choices independent of his control because of his love for them. He is still there, waiting and willing to help even when they make bad choices in their lives. This comparison between God and the compassionate father in this story would be an obvious comparison to a first-century audience. The all-powerful God in traditional Jewish thinking is compared to a helpless parent. After all, most know from experience, whether from having children or being one in the past, that no parent can control the will of a child. Just like the helpless father in the parable, the Creator of heaven and earth allows us to choose even when we make the wrong choice. Some of us make choices like the elder son and some like the younger son, but from time to time we all make wrong choices.²³⁹

The compassionate father in the parable is a minute reflection of our compassionate father/God. God allows us to make our own choices, even if we make

²³⁸ Young, *The Parables*, 130-31.

²³⁹ Ibid., 147-48.

wrong choices that bring disaster in our lives. God is always ready and willing to accept his children back into the family when they “come to themselves” and return home.²⁴⁰

“Each individual person can see himself or herself in the sons of the parable.”²⁴¹

This parable sends a message, which is a call to action. It calls us to understand that God is our compassionate father that is yearning to have a strong and meaningful relationship with us, his children. There are two kinds of sinners in this parable. There is an outwardly righteous sinner who is just as wrong as the blatantly wicked sinner. Hatred and resentment are the vice of the eldest brother. On the surface he appears to be outwardly righteous, but on the inside he is found to be in great need. He needs to be restored into a right relationship with the father and needs to somehow learn to forgive his brother. Though humans often neglect to realize it, forgiveness and reconciliation often hinders us from a right relationship with the Father. This parable is replete with this thought. God is represented as a compassionate father and sin is a broken relationship. First and foremost this parable depicts God as a compassionate parent who desires to have a strong and healthy relationship with his two children. Through this father’s drama of family crisis, the hearer is led on a path that leads to an urgent decision.²⁴²

God is represented as a compassionate father and sin is the broken relationship between God and humankind. In our earthly relationships, fathers should exhibit the same compassion God extends to us all and a broken relationship between a father and his children is sinful.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 148.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 149.

²⁴² Ibid., 157.

The Theological Foundation

For Origen, the affirmation of the fatherhood of God was central in his discussion of God and salvation. Christians referred to God as father as a matter of course in the early days of the faith. It was not until the fourth century that the fatherhood of God became an issue of sustained and systematic analysis with Athanasius. It was Athanasius who laid the foundations for a fundamental precept of later Trinitarian thought-the Father-Son relation is part of the definition of the word of God. Those who followed, in thinking on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit broadly used the parameters of his discussion.²⁴³

Little attention is given to the history of the idea of divine fatherhood in early Christian thought. Athanasius was not the first Alexandrian to write about divine fatherhood. He was writing in the context of an Alexandrian tradition of reflecting on the fatherhood of God. In this tradition, the terms father and son were the determinative metaphors for theological discussion.²⁴⁴ His formulation of the idea of the fatherhood of God was deeply influenced by his tradition.²⁴⁵

Origen was the most important predecessor for Athanasius. He did not make the fatherhood of God a systematic analysis. He did not treat fatherhood as a separate theme. Studies show Origen believed that the affirmation of God as Father lay at the heart of his Christian faith. In Origen's thinking, to know God fully and thus be saved is to know God

²⁴³ Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 2.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 2.

as Father; having been servants, we become sons [and daughters] by adoption through faith in the one who is Son by nature.²⁴⁶

For Origen, the fatherhood of God was integral in the overall pattern of his theological vision. There are two points of focus in his understanding of God as Father: the relationship between the Father and the Son and the relationship between the Father and those adopted as sons. “The Father-Son relationship is the means by which creation is brought into being and it is also both the means and the model for the subsequent restoration of that creation to the knowledge of God, a restoration that entails our coming to sonship and the knowledge of God as Father.”²⁴⁷

The Father-Son relationship is a separate distinction between God and his creation. Origen’s thoughts about God as Father are set against the background of the Marcionite claim that the creator God portrayed in the Old Testament is not the same as the God who is portrayed as Father in the New Testament.²⁴⁸ Origen disagrees with this mode of thinking.

References to God as Father abound in Origen’s writings. They are replete with biblical quotations in which God is referred to as Father. He never bothers to attempt to establish the reality that God is Father. His writings imply he felt that God as Father was a given datum of the Christian faith. “The issues that arise for Origen concerning God’s fatherhood mainly pertain to how that fatherhood is to be thought about in the light of

²⁴⁶ Peter Widdicombe, 2.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 63.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

two other accepted realities of the Christian faith: the generation of the Son and the adoption of Christians as sons.”²⁴⁹

Origen intends to present the creator God of the Old Testament as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in direct tension with Marcionite thought. For Origen, God is indisputably Father.²⁵⁰ His most systematic comments about the fatherhood of God come when he discusses the Father-Son relationship.

“Fatherhood is a part of God’s eternal nature.”²⁵¹ In the *Dialogue of Heraclides* he concludes denying the distinct existence of the Son is tantamount to denying the existence of the Father. “God as Father must have a Son in order to be what *he* is, and the Son as Son must have a Father in order to be what he is.”²⁵² They both exist eternally. This differs in God’s relation to God’s creation. Humankind participates in this eternal relationship through God’s Son.

Three difficulties must be mentioned in discussion of this theological foundation. First, we must be cognizant that Father language is offensive to some. We must approach God and communicate God in a manner that incorporates all of who God is and all of humankind because we were all created in God’s image. The period in which Origen originated his thinking is a paternalistic period that does not take into consideration this important fact. The Father language used in this portion of the document is used to communicate properly his thoughts and stay faithful to the language of his times. It is in now way intended to reflect any gender bias on the researcher’s part.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 63-64.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 65.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 69.

²⁵² Ibid.

Secondly, gender may have an affect referring to God as Father, but also individual experiences may have an affect on it, also. There are numerous persons who had debilitating, painful relationships with their fathers. This presents huge difficulties in them referring to God as Father, because the word “father” represent so much recurring pain and agony.

Third, Origen’s Father language runs parallel with the language of the chosen New Testament pericope. The researcher understands the issues surrounding the use of such language and has used it out of necessity. “The three main tenets of Origen’s argument for the eternity of God’s fatherhood, that the words /Father and Son are the given terms of Christian tradition, that Father and Son are correlatives, and that the generation of the Son is eternal.”²⁵³

It is through God’s Son that God becomes our Father. “[Origen’s] skepticism about our ability to apprehend God without the mediation of the Son finds a particular focus in relation to God’s nature as Father: ‘He is the God and Father [and mother] of all, though for some he is God and not Father, while for others he is God and Father’ Until our souls are made perfect through our participation in the Son, we cannot know God as Father, but only as Lord.”²⁵⁴

According to Origen, “the eternal generation of the Son has causal priority.” It is through the spirit of adoption and our participation in our Lord Jesus that we become

²⁵³ Ibid., 2.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 79.

Sons of God. Our Father-Son relationship is of a second order to that of the Son's relationship, yet we are Sons.²⁵⁵

"The Son is the model for our knowing and loving God. We share in the Son's continuous 'uninterrupted contemplation of the depths of the Father'. Origen is suggesting that the Father's eternal delight in his only-begotten Son becomes ours as well, as we, with and in the Son, turn unceasingly towards the riches of the Father."²⁵⁶

Creation arises from the Father-Son relationship and returns to share in that relationship. "Origen thinks of the process of God's salvation of man, and the end to which is directed, in much the same terms he thinks about the relationship between the Father and the Son."²⁵⁷

This has direct correlation to the story of the father and two sons found in Luke 15.11-32. This parable represents the salvation of humankind by a loving God who cares for the children. The younger son returns to share in the Father-Son relationship and the Father welcomes him with open arms.

Though there are many in this postmodern society that never knew their fathers or have experienced traumatic relationships with their fathers, our heavenly Father provides us with another option. Many may never have the relationship with their *earthly* fathers they desire, but God the Father steps in to be a father to the fatherless. Our relationship with the heavenly father supersedes any relationship we could have with our earthly fathers. And likewise, our human father/child relationships should reflect the Father/Son relationship within the eternal godhead.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 98.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 118.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 119.

The threat that was posed to Athanasius by Arius forced Athanasius to self-consciously attempt to define what the Church's tradition of referring to God as Father meant for a coherent theology of the divine nature of God and for salvation. His thinking about the fatherhood of God was heavily influenced by responding to Arius' denial of the divine status of the Son.²⁵⁸

Athanasius believed, "to deny the Son was divine in the same sense the Father was divine was tantamount to denying the eternity of God's fatherhood. He adopted the three tenets of Origen's argument for the eternity of the divine fatherhood and expanded them."²⁵⁹

"It is the relation of love between the Father and Son which is the model for the life of the Christian community. For Arius, it would seem that it was logically possible to speak of God without referring to him as Father, this was not possible for Athanasius."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Developing A Transformative Model Of African-American Fatherhood From A Biblical Perspective was born out of the struggles of fathers to be “good” fathers. At First Baptist Church, there was no outlet for men to come together, without the presence of women, just be men and discuss pertinent issues from men’s perspectives. None of the men at the church had ever been taught on a consistent basis how to be a father from a biblical perspective. There is also a majority of young men growing up in single-parent homes with little or no interaction in their lives by their fathers. The adult men who participated in this group experienced much of the same in their relationships with their fathers. Many of them have struggled in fatherhood, feeling like they were “winging it,” because they never had a man to teach them how to be a father.

The researcher proposed the Bible could be used as a transformational tool to help African American fathers better understand what it means to be a father from a biblical perspective. This would be the first men’s group set aside purely for the purpose of helping men better understand what it means to be a father from a biblical perspective. The group would meet weekly for spiritual formation classes centered on biblical fatherhood. This spiritual formation would focus on biblical fatherhood, hopefully answer questions on biblical fatherhood, and provide space for men to gather, learn, vent, discuss, complain, and dialogue about their struggles to be good fathers.

The first step was to gather information from the participants to get a sense of their understanding of certain issues centered on fatherhood. A fifty-question survey was given that focused on their understanding of what it means to be a biblical father; their understandings of proper interaction between husband and wife; their understandings of raising children, discipline, affection, role modeling, communication, parental responsibilities, etc. This group was composed of seven African-American men, all of which were fathers.

Again, the goal of the researcher was ascertain whether or not these spiritual formation classes would enhance the participant's understanding of fatherhood from a biblical perspective. The researcher determined the qualitative research approach would be the best approach because of numerical limitations within the study. Qualitative research is a field of inquiry. It is "...an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting."¹ The researcher used this method of research because the researcher's goal was to develop an in depth understanding of whether or not the participants understanding of biblical fatherhood increased by participating in a study focusing on a biblical understanding of fatherhood.

The researcher used data triangulation to validate to study. Triangulation is when "the researcher tries to measure a concept in as many ways as possible; at least more than two. Triangulation does two things at once: it assesses whether a phenomenon has

¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2007), 249.

occurred and often the degree of the phenomenon so it addresses reliability. It is also assessing the convergent validity of a construct, i.e., whether different measures appear to assess the same variable.”² The use of data triangulation established credibility and validity to the results of the study. Triangulation is also called *cross-examination*. “Guba and Lincoln proposed four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research.” They proposed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.³

“The credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. Since from this perspective, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant’s eyes, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results.”⁴

“Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings.”⁵

“The idea of dependability...emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. The research is responsible for describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the research approached the study.”⁶

² Susan Carol Losh, “Guide 7: An Introduction To Less Structured Methods,” May 12, 2009, <http://mailer.fsu.edu/~slosh/MethodsGuide7.html> (accessed September 2, 2010).

³ William M. K. Trochim, “Qualitative Validity,” 10 20, 2006, <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualval.php> (accessed September 2, 2010).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

“Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others.”⁷

In order to establish credibility, the researcher collected data from the participants in three forms: pre and post surveys, group interview, and individual exit interviews. Transferability was established by a detailed description of the project. Dependability was established by documenting the variations associated with the project. Confirmability was established by interviewing and documenting the participants in the program.

⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

In spring 2010, First Baptist Church and the researcher initiated a men only spiritual formation group, centering on biblical fatherhood. This program focused on providing a biblical foundation to fathers to increase their knowledge of biblical fatherhood. Seven African American fathers were selected from the congregation to participate in these spiritual formation classes. The age range was thirty-five to seventy-eight years of age (Appendix D). The men chosen were very receptive to the researcher and the spiritual formation program. Throughout the program the participants sustained contact with the researcher through face-to-face contact, telephone calls, and text messaging.

The spiritual formation group met for ten weeks. These classes consisted of study and discussion of 2 Samuel 18.19-33 and Luke 15.11-32. The story of King David's relationship with his son Absalom is found in 2 Samuel 18.19-33. This text demonstrates that King David excelled in a variety of areas, but fatherhood does not seem to be one of them. We discover in Luke 15.11-32, the story of a dysfunctional family in which the father struggles to demonstrate a fatherhood that resembles God the Father's relationship with humankind.

The first week was an interest meeting in which the researcher explained why the program was being initiated, why they were chosen, and what some of the proposed

benefits might be. As stated previously, the fathers were very receptive and excited about their participation in such a program.

Week two consisted of each participant filling out a fifty-question pre-survey questionnaire (Appendix A). The pre-survey questionnaire was designed to gauge any changes in behavioral attitudes on biblical fatherhood. It was also designed with the scriptures used as a biblical foundation for this project in mind. The results of the pre-survey and the post-survey are listed at the end of this chapter.

Week three, four and five focused on teaching, questions, comments and dialogue on the Old Testament pericope chosen for this project: 2 Samuel 18.19-33. During these spiritual formation classes, these fathers were allowed to interject their comments, ideas, and feelings about the chosen text. They were allowed to ask questions, make comments throughout, and have open discussion within the group setting.

Week six, seven, and eight focused on teaching, questions, comments and dialogue on the New Testament pericope chosen for this project: Luke 15.11-32. Again, during these spiritual formation classes, these fathers were allowed to interject their comments, ideas, and feelings about the chosen text. They were allowed to ask questions, make comments throughout, and have open discussion within the group.

Week nine consisted of the participants filling out a post-survey questionnaire (Appendix A). The post survey was identical to the pre-survey in order to gauge whether or not their understanding of biblical fatherhood increased.

Week ten consisted of a group interview with dialogue and discussion on the effectiveness of the project. This was a more informal interview in which the researcher initiated discussion about the effectiveness and desirability of the program.

The pre and post surveys, the group interview and the individual interviews reflect significant changes in attitudes and behaviors. These changes reflect the transformational nature of the project.

The following are the results of the pre and post surveys. The researcher gives an analysis of those responses that show a marked change in behavioral thought patterns in reference to biblical fatherhood.

PRE AND POST SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

1. I understand the basics of what biblical fatherhood is.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 disagreed	3 agreed
2 don't know	4 strongly agreed
4 agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of this program only four of seven participants agreed that they understood the basics of biblical fatherhood. After completing the program all agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the basics of biblical fatherhood. Those who said they understood the basics of what biblical fatherhood is grew from fifty-seven percent to one hundred percent. This reflects a forty-three percent increase in those who said they understood the basics of biblical fatherhood.

2. Who is the person in the Bible you believe adequately models what fatherhood should look like? One answer please.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 Paul	7 father of prodigal son
2 Joseph	
1 Abraham	
1 Job	
1 Jacob	
1 don't know	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program the participants chose various individuals they believed modeled biblical fatherhood. Upon completion of the program, all viewed the father of the prodigal son as the person who models what biblical fatherhood looks like. The researcher believes this indicates a better understanding of what biblical fatherhood should look like.

3. Who was the person in your life that you believe modeled biblical fatherhood?

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 uncle Bill	1 uncle Bill
1 Deacon Jones	1 Deacon Jones
1 cousin David	1 cousin David
1 Ronald Urghart-friend	1 Ronald Urghart-friend
1 Dr. J.R. Hedgely	1 father in law
1 Dr. Caple	1 Dr. Caple
1 No one	1 No one

Analyzing the Data

There was only one change in the persons the participants believed modeled biblical fatherhood in their lives. That change was from Dr. Hedgely to father-in-law.

- a. Please give five characteristics that demonstrate biblical fatherhood.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 no answer	6 forgiveness
1 understanding	5 grace
1 calm	6 mercy
1 warm-hearted	6 love
2 Bible reader	3 understanding
1 lived the life	1 positive attitude
2 love for God	1 studied Bible
1 love for wife	1 open arms
1 love for children	1 generous
1 love for church	
1 love for community	
1 study Bible	
1 quotes scripture	
1 walks in the Spirit	
1 prays for people	
1 helps people	
1 being a good Christian	
1 loves everybody	
1 love yourself	
1 concern for all children	
1 respectful	
1 positive role model	
1 community leader	
5 no answer	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program the participants gave twenty-four different answers to this question. After completion of this program participants gave nine different answers to this questions. The post-survey answers reflect a narrowing of their understanding of characteristics that model biblical fatherhood. These answers more closely reflect the tents of Christianity.

4. Being the strong silent type is a model biblical fatherhood.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 strongly disagree	7 strongly disagree
6 disagree	

5. Men who practice biblical fatherhood are looked at as wimps.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 strongly disagree	5 strongly disagree
4 disagree	2 disagree
1 don't know	
1 agree	

6. Do you believe in the old adage, "Do as I say and not as I do?"

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
3 disagree	3 strongly disagree
3 agree	1 don't know
1 strongly agree	2 agree
	1 strongly agree

7. Raising a daughter is primarily the mother's responsibility.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
3 strongly disagree	7 strongly disagree
3 disagree	
1 agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, participant's answers reflected they were less adamant about this question. After completing the program, the answers seem to reflect an increase in the participant's views on whether or not the father should help raise daughters.

8. Raising the son is primarily the father's responsibility.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 strongly disagree	6 strongly disagree
3 disagree	1 strongly agree
2 agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program two out of seven participants agreed that raising the son was primarily the father's responsibility. After the program, all seven participants disagreed that it was primarily the father's responsibility to raise the son. This reflects a twenty-nine percent increase in participants who agree it is not primarily the father's responsibility to raise the son.

9. A father should not show his emotions.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 strongly disagree	4 strongly disagree
4 disagree	2 disagree
1 agree	1 agree

10. Boys need less direction than girls.

Pre-Survey Responses

1 strongly disagree
6 disagree

Post-Survey Responses

4 strongly disagree
2 disagree
1 strongly agree

11. How do you think a father should teach his children?

Pre-Survey Responses

6 through conversation and
your own behavior
1 through their own life experiences

Post-Survey Responses

7 through conversation and
your own behavior

12. The father's job is primarily to provide for the family and the mother's job is primarily to raise the children.

Pre-Survey Responses

1 strongly disagree
2 disagree
3 agree
1 strongly agree

Post-Survey Responses

4 strongly disagree
3 disagree

13. Fathers play an important and irreplaceable role in the lives of children.

Pre-Survey Responses

1 disagree
4 agree
2 strongly agree

Post-Survey Responses

1 agree
6 strongly agree

14. I have a high level of satisfaction when it comes to fathering.

Pre-Survey Responses

2 disagree
1 don't know
3 agree
1 strongly agree

Post-Survey Responses

3 agree
4 strongly agree

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, fifty-seven percent of the participants agreed they have a high level of satisfaction when it comes to fathering. After completing the program, one hundred percent of the participants agreed they have a high level of satisfaction when it comes to fathering. This reflects a forty-three percent increase in participants who agreed they have a high level of satisfaction when it comes to fathering. This indicates that something transformative happened in their thought process during the program that enhanced their level of satisfaction.

15. One of the most important factors facing America today, specifically the African American Family, is the absence of the father from the home.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 agree	7 strongly agree
5 strongly agree	

16. Fathers influence their children either in a positive way or a negative way.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
5 agree	2 agree
2 strongly agree	5 strongly agree

17. To be a biblical father you must spend time with your children.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 disagree	7 strongly agree
4 agree	
2 strongly agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, one participant disagreed with this statement. After completing the program, all participants agreed with this statement. This reflects a fourteen percent increase in participants who agreed with this statement.

18. Living in the house with your children and having a relationship with them is two different things.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 disagree	3 agree
1 don't know	4 strongly agree
3 agree	
1 strongly agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, fifty-seven percent of participants agreed with this statement. After completing the program, one hundred percent of the participants agreed with this statement. This reflects a forty-three percent increase in participants who believe having a relationship with your children consist of more than just living in the same house.

19. You can live in the house with your children and not have a meaningful relationship with them.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 don't know	3 agree
4 agree	4 strongly agree
2 strongly agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, eighty-eight percent of the participants agreed with this statement. After completing the program, one hundred percent of the participants agreed with this statement. Again, this reflects the participants increased understanding that it takes more than just living in the same house to have a meaningful relationship with your children.

20. Making money to pay the bills is more important than being home to spend time with the children.

Pre-Survey Responses	Post-Survey Responses
2 strongly disagree	3 strongly disagree
4 disagree	4 disagree
1 strongly agree	

21. My history affects my ability to be a good father.

Pre-Survey Responses	Post-Survey Responses
5 disagree	2 strongly disagree
1 don't know	2 disagree
1 agree	2 agree
	1 strongly agree

22. Struggling to make it in this world makes it hard to be a good father.

Pre-Survey Responses	Post-Survey Responses
1 strongly disagree	1 disagree
5 disagree	5 agree
1 agree	1 strongly agree

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, one participant agreed that struggling to make it in this world increase the difficulty of being a good father. After completing the program, six of the participants agreed that struggling to make it in this world increases the difficulty of being a good father. This reflects a seventy-four percent increase in participants who agreed with this statement.

23. Men are not meant to be with one woman for their entire lives.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 strongly disagree	2 strongly disagree
4 disagree	3 disagree
1 agree	2 agree

24. Cheating is something that most men do; it's a part of our nature.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 strongly disagree	1 strongly disagree
2 disagree	1 disagree
4 agree	5 agree

Analyzing the Data

The answer to this question was somewhat troubling. At the beginning of the program fifty-seven percent of the participants, and seventy-one percent after completing the program, agree that cheating is something that most men do because it is a part of our nature. The participants do not seem to relate faithfulness to their wives to being a biblical father. Any continuation of this program would include teaching on marital faithfulness.

25. My job comes before my family, because I have to be able to provide for them.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 strongly disagree	2 strongly disagree
3 disagree	3 disagree
3 agree	2 agree

26. I don't worry about children watching me; they know the difference between right and wrong.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
3 strongly disagree	3 strongly disagree
4 disagree	3 disagree
	1 agree

27. The decisions my children make in their lives have little or nothing to do with me.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 strongly disagree	1 strongly disagree
5 disagree	3 disagree
1 agree	3 agree

28. I realize that my children suffer because of how I live my life.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 strongly disagree	2 disagree
3 disagree	5 agree
3 agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, three out of seven participants agreed that the way we live our lives could cause suffering in the lives of our children. After completing the program, five out of seven agreed with this statement. This reflects a twenty-five percent increase in participants who agree with this statement.

29. Some things my children do are a direct result of what they have watched me do in my life.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 disagree	1 disagree
1 don't know	6 agree
3 agree	
1 strongly agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, four out of seven participants agreed with this statement. After completing the program, six out of seven participants agreed with this statement. The data reflects a thirty-one percent increase in participants who realize their children may imitate the negative behavior of their fathers. This realization could possibly cause the fathers to be more careful of behaviors exhibited in front of the children.

30. I don't plan on leaving my children an inheritance because nobody did it for me.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 strongly disagree	3 strongly disagree
4 disagree	4 disagree
1 don't know	

31. Once my children leave home they can't come back, they're grown, they have to fend for themselves.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 strongly disagree	4 strongly disagree
4 disagree	2 disagree
1 don't know	1 agree

32. I will never forgive my children for some things they have done to me.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 strongly disagree	3 strongly disagree
4 disagree	4 disagree
1 don't know	

33. I will help them as much as I can, but once they mess up, I'm done.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 strongly disagree	1 strongly disagree
3 disagree	6 disagree
1 don't know	
1 agree	
1 strongly agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, only three disagreed with this statement. After completing the program, all participants agreed with this program. This is a forty-three percent increase in participants who disagreed with this statement. This reflects the participants now understand being a biblical father includes extending grace and mercy to our children when they make mistakes in their lives.

34. I tell my children I love them all the time.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
3 disagree	1 disagree
2 agree	4 agree
2 strongly agree	2 strongly agree

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, four out of seven participants agreed with this statement. After completing the program, six out of seven agreed with this statement. This is a thirty-one percent increase in participants who agreed with this statement which reflects an increased understanding of the importance of communicating to their children they love them.

35. I hug and embrace my children often.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 disagree	5 agree
4 agree	2 strongly agree
1 strongly agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, four out of seven participants agreed with this statement. After completing the program, seven out of seven participants agreed with this statement. They communicated their increased awareness of whether or not they initiated physical contact with their children. This is a forty-three percent increase in participants who understand the significance of physical contact with their children.

36. My children can do no wrong.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
5 strongly disagree	4 strongly disagree
2 disagree	3 disagree

37. I always let my children know when they have done something I consider wrong.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
3 agree	1 disagree
4 strongly agree	5 agree
	1 strongly agree

38. I try to teach my children integrity.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 disagree	5 agree
4 agree	2 strongly agree
2 strongly agree	

39. I try to help settle disagreements between siblings.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
4 agree	1 disagree
3 strongly agree	4 agree
	2 strongly agree

40. I see nothing wrong with showing favoritism between my children.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
4 strongly disagree	4 strongly disagree
2 disagree	3 disagree
1 don't know	

41. Jealousy between siblings is normal and harmless.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 strongly disagree	2 strongly disagree
3 disagree	3 disagree
1 don't know	2 agree
1 agree	

42. I talk with my children often.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 disagree	4 agree
4 agree	3 strongly agree
2 strongly agree	

43. I interact with my children's lives on a regular basis.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 disagree	1 disagree
4 agree	6 agree
1 strongly agree	

44. I pray for my children on a regular basis.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 disagree	5 agree
4 agree	2 strongly agree
2 strongly agree	

45. I believe in spoiling my children.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 strongly disagree	1 strongly disagree
5 disagree	5 disagree
	1 agree

46. I believe in disciplining my children.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
4 agree	5 agree
3 strongly agree	2 strongly agree

47. A father's job is to do the disciplining and the mother should handle everything else.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
2 strongly disagree	3 strongly disagree
4 disagree	3 disagree
1 agree	1 don't know

48. I make it a point to be as involved in my children's lives as much as I can.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
3 disagree	6 agree
3 agree	1 strongly agree
1 strongly agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, three participants disagreed with this statement. After completing the program, all participants agreed with this statement. This reflects a forty-three percent increase in participants who agree with this statement, which implies the participants increased understanding of the importance of being involved in their children's lives.

49. My children would say that I am a great father.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
1 disagree	6 agree
3 don't know	1 strongly agree
1 agree	
2 strongly agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, only three of the participants agreed with this statement. After completing the program, all of the participants agreed with this statement. This is a forty-six percent increase in participants who agreed with this statement. This may reflect a change in the father's behavior toward their children over the life of the program or a change in the father's understanding of what it means to be a biblical father. The researcher believes it was a combination of the two.

50. My children would say that I do not understand what biblical fatherhood is.

<u>Pre-Survey Responses</u>	<u>Post-Survey Responses</u>
5 disagree	3 strongly disagree
1 don't know	4 disagree
1 agree	

Analyzing the Data

At the beginning of the program, five out of seven disagreed with this statement. After completing the program, all of the participants agreed with this statement. This is a twenty-nine percent increase in participants who disagreed with this statement. This indicates there was a twenty-nine percent increase in those who believe their children would say their fathers do understand what biblical fatherhood is.

Weekly Attendance

The following data is reflective of the total number of African American fathers who participated in the spiritual formation classes on biblical fatherhood. Prior to the start of the program, these men were members of First Baptist Church of Lexington, North Carolina.

<u>Week #</u>	<u>Attendance</u>		
1.	7	6.	7
2.	7	7.	6
3.	7	8.	7
4.	7	9.	7
5.	6	10.	7

Analyzing the Data

The data reflects the program did in fact significantly increase this group of African-American father's understanding of fatherhood from a biblical perspective.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

As the program came to a close, the researcher realized there were numerous transformative moments throughout its implementation. Throughout the ten-week period, the researcher taught, mentored and counseled African American men of varying ages (Appendix D). There were also some reflective moments concerning other things that could be added to the program. Some of these were not or could not be added this time due to time limitations. The participants had numerous transformative moments during the ten-week program. Unexpectedly, so did the researcher.

The ministry focus of this project was developing a transformative model of African American fatherhood from a biblical perspective. After concluding a ten-week program designed around accomplishing the ministry focus, the researcher has noted a few things that could be added to the program.

First, the spouses of the participants could be added. They could assist the researcher in measuring whether or not transformation is taking place in the participant. The spouse is probably best suited to witness the growth of the participant in his day-to-day interaction with his children. One method of measurement could be giving the spouses a pre and post survey.

Second, the children of the participants could also be enlisted to measure the growth of the participants. Of course, age would be a determining factor. This might work better if the children were older or adults.

Third, using persons other than the researcher to facilitate the spiritual formation classes would be of added value. Taking the group to an outside event such as conferences or classes would also be a valuable aid. Different perspectives gives the participants varied viewpoints in which to choose from.

Fourth, utilizing the additional plethora of biblical texts along with 2 Samuel 18.19-33 and Luke 15.11-32, that provides additional instruction on fatherhood. The time constraints prevented the researcher from utilizing these additional texts.

There are almost unlimited ways of expanding the work of the researcher.

As previously stated, there were numerous transformative moments during the implementation of the program. Some were expected and some were not. The researcher expected the men to learn from the biblical texts that were provided for study and discussion, but there were other transformative moments that could not be planned.

First, the participants had numerous occasions when the discussion diverted away from the chosen texts and into their personal lives. The researcher initially resisted, but eventually allowed for this flexibility, because it was in these moments that true transformation seemed to take place. When these occasions occurred, the researcher and the other participants would respond. The men seemed to enjoy the freedom of being able to discuss the material in light of their personal contexts, and vice versa. They also seemed to enjoy helping others think through and process difficult situations in their lives.

Second, the researcher did not expect the level of commitment the participants exhibited. These men very rarely missed a group session. When they did miss a session it was something that was unavoidable. They were, for the most part, always on time and were not in a hurry to leave. This is surprising as the majority of African American churches are struggling to attract the demographic the researcher was working with. There was something about the gathering that was appealing to the participants even though it was in a Bible study format.

Third, the men became very transparent about their personal lives and difficult situations they had experienced throughout their lives. The level at which they did this was somewhat surprising. Men are normally somewhat guarded about their participation in sharing private matters publicly. These men slowly began to let their guard down.

Fourth, the researcher discovered these men enjoyed coming together and just being men. They enjoyed being in an environment where women were not allowed, where they could speak candidly about their struggles without the fear of reprisal. They enjoyed being around other men who, for the most part, experienced similar struggles in their efforts at fatherhood and could relate to theirs. The participants enjoyed the discussions and fellowship so much, they did not want the class to end. This was a complete surprise to the researcher.

The researcher hypothesized that maybe African American churches could attract more men if they provided space for men, to just be men. The dynamics of the group were simple: African American men, meeting with other African American men, about African American men, being better African American fathers. This, in and of itself, was very appealing to the participants in the program.

These men enjoyed the program so much they expressed to the researcher that the church needed to offer classes like this more often. This was a pleasant surprise to the researcher. One unexpected outcome of this program is First Baptist Church, Lexington, North Carolina will start a new men's Bible Study in January 2011, because the participants in this program decided the program was a much-needed ministry for the men of the church.

There was a secondary transformative moment during the program. This transformative moment was not in the participants in the group; this transformative moment was within the researcher. This also was an unexpected outcome of the program. This transformative moment occurred throughout the program, but particularly during the Ministry Focus portion.

The researcher underestimated the impact preparing this document would have on his psyche. When he delved into preparing this document, old emotions began to arise. The researcher had to return once more to some painful areas of his life story. Though this was somewhat emotional, it was fruitful. The researcher underestimated the impact recapitulating his story again would have on him. He did not expect for it to affect him in such an emotional manner again. The researcher believes experiencing his story numerous times has brought on additional emotional and psychological healing. Every additional time the researcher reviewed his relationship with his own father, it moved him closer to a sense of healing and wholeness.

The researcher realizes that his father was a wounded man, who was probably never taught how to love or father. He most likely learned what he knew on his own. The researcher's father and mother were taken from him in his teenage years. This must have

left deep wounds inside him which he never got help for. The manner in which he lost them was also very traumatic. He was wounded and through his woundedness he wounded the researcher along with others in his life.

The researcher realizes his father did not know or understand that he was wounding his son for life. John Eldredge says, “Every boy, in his journey to become a man, takes an arrow in the center of his heart, in the place of his strength. Because the wound is rarely discussed and even more rarely healed, every man carries a wound. And the wound is nearly always given by his father.”¹ Eldredge also discusses similar wounds for girls, “...like every little boy, she has taken a wound as well. The wound strikes right at the core of her heart of beauty and leaves a devastating message with it: No. You’re not beautiful and no one will really fight for you. Like your wound, hers almost always comes at the hand of her father.”² He adds, “A little girl looks to her father to know if she is lovely. The power he has to cripple or to bless is just as significant to her as it is to his son.”³ The preparation of the Ministry Focus section of this project necessitated an honest discussion, albeit in writing, of the researcher’s wound.

Through this discussion, transformation took place. The researcher better understands his father’s plight. He did not intend to hurt the people around him, including the researcher, but he knew no other way. He only knew how to operate out of his own inner pain and turmoil.

¹ John Eldredge, *Wild At Heart: Discovering The Secret Of A Man's Soul* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 72.

² Ibid., 217.

³ Ibid.

The researcher also realizes that his drive for success and high achievement; his striving to be a better father; his striving to be a better husband; his belief that he can achieve and do anything he sets his mind and heart to all stem from his relationship with his father. He is appreciative of the fact that he has been able to take those negatives and transform them into positives in his own life. Those negative experiences have served as a catalyst. They have made him a better man, father, and husband, which is what the researcher desired for the program participants to actuate in their lives. The researcher wonders if his growth as a father would have been achieved if it were not for his experiences with his father.

And lastly, who would have ever thought that the black sheep of the family, the “dummy” who as a child thought he could not do anything right in his father’s eyes, would now be writing about their dysfunctional relationship as the topic of his final document in preparation for a Doctor of Ministry degree?

This program was a qualitative research effort, therefore, the researcher developed numerous ways to collect and analyze data. The collection of data was accomplished through the pre and post survey, the group interview, and individual interviews.

The pre and post surveys given were identical in order to measure whether or not the individuals understanding of biblical fatherhood increased. The pre-survey was given before the spiritual formation classes ensued. The post-survey was given upon completion of the spiritual formation classes.

In addition to the pre and post survey, a group interview/discussion was given to get feedback from the group. The group was asked to give feedback on how they felt about the program and whether or not they thought the program was beneficial to their

own development. It was in this discussion the group gave recommendations for changes in the program and their opinions on the effectiveness of the program for the group. It was the unanimous opinion of the group that the program was effective in activating transformation in the lives of the participants. The results are below.

The third means of data collection was individual exit interviews (Appendix C). In the individual exit interviews the researcher asked specific questions about the effectiveness of the program on a personal level along with a few demographic questions. The individual exit interviews were to provide space for participants to express their individual opinions on the effectiveness of the program. In the individual interviews participants could elaborate on their views, and also give honest opinions if they did not think the program was effective.

The following data reflects significant discoveries from first, the group interview/discussion and second, the individual exit interviews. The participants are referred to as participant #1, participant #2, participant #3, etc. to ensure the privacy of the participants.

Significant Discoveries From Group Interview/Discussion

The following is a list of questions by the researcher and the group's answers.

1. Do you believe going through a process like this is beneficial and helpful for men, fathers learning what it means to be a biblical father?
Group Answer: The group answered a resounding, *"Yes."* *"It should have spread out amongst more of the men in the congregation."*

2. Do you all think this works well enough with this group that we need to start a men come together to just talk about men stuff?
Group Answer: The group again answered with a unanimous, "Yes."
3. Do you think you have a better understanding of what it means to be a biblical father after looking at these texts and having discussion amongst us?
Group answer: The group again answered with a unanimous, "Yes."
4. In what ways do you think this group has actually helped you in being a better father or a biblical father.
Participant #2: *"For one thing, you sit around and talk. You hear other men and you see that a lot of them have the same problems you have. You interact and you get ideas from other people."*
Participant #6: *"That helps you a whole lot."*
Participant #1: *"You have things on your mind and you might need somebody to talk to."*
5. So, you learn but you also get a chance to vent?
Group Answer: A unanimous, "Yes."
6. What else could we add to a group like this to make it better? Do you think there are other things we can add on top of the Bible Studies?
Participant #7: *"Well, you could bring in other people and instructors to talk on different areas."*
Participant #5: *"We could compare our answers and ideas with men from other churches."*
Participant #6: *"Most of the other churches don't even have a class like this. Most of their men don't know what it is to be a biblical father. We could invite them in to let them know what it means to be a biblical father."*
7. What are some additional topics that this group thinks would be helpful to men in general, in their lives, trying to be godly men? What are some of the other topics you think we could have some teaching and discussion on?
Suggested topics were: *love, caring, understanding, appreciating your wife, better marital relationships, better relationships with your children, singleness, working, integrity, pulling your pants up, dressing, ownership, responsibility, sex, how to treat a woman, and being a godly man.*

8. Does this group have any other recommendations on how something like this ought to be done?
Group Answers: *"Go to conferences, field trips, and to places who are having events centered around men trying to live a godly life."*
9. Did you enjoy the class?
Group answer: *"Yes."*
10. Would you recommend this group to other men?
Group Answer: *"Yes."*
11. Would you say that you learned a little, a lot, or somewhere in between?
Group Answer: *"We learned a lot."*
12. While you were participating in this class, did you find yourself changing any of your behavior?
Group Answer: A unanimous, *"Yes."*
13. When you were dealing with your children, did any of our discussions come to mind?
Group Answer: A unanimous, *"Yes."*
14. What are some things we learned from the life of David?
Participant #6: *"Not to be like him for one thing. He was stuck on just one of his children, Absalom."*
Participant #2: *"You can just do anything you want to do around your kids. You have to show love to your kids."*
Participant #4: *"David was a mean man. He would kill you if you said the wrong thing to him. His son was trying to get attention from him and he ignored his son."*
Participant #6: *"That's what happened to a lot of people in the world today. Some of these kids that don't get attention will blow your brains out."*
Participant #7: *"What if we had been taught this when we were young? When I was coming along, we were taught to be macho. But, if we had been taught like this, to show love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, it's ok to cry, how to treat people with kindness and love; I think things would be a whole lot better than what it is now. These kids out here in the street; this is actually what they are looking for, but they can't get it. They just want somebody to love them and look out for them."*

15. What are some things we learned from the father in the prodigal son story?

Participant #6: *"He was a forgiving man. He never stopped loving his son. You can tell by the way he went out to him. He never stopped loving him. He showed mercy. He was protecting him when he ran out to him. He knew they might have stoned his son."*

Participant #7: *"To me, it shows a good balance. He went out to both of his sons. He never ridiculed. That's what it is about, stepping up. Do your job as a man and as a father and it will pay off. He wasn't intimidated either. He did what he had to do and did not care what anybody else thought about it. He let them make their own decisions, even when it was a bad decision."*

Participant #6: *"You know, I was just thinking about something. Where was the wife?"*

Researcher's Answer: *"She is never mentioned in the story because this is not about the wife, it's about the father."*

Participant #7: *"We are just like the prodigal son in this story. We have gone off and done whatever we wanted to do. We drifted away from God, but yet, God still allowed us to come back home. We mess up all the time and he keeps on forgiving us."*

16. Is there anything else in the prodigal son text that you found helpful?

Participant #6: *"I think there is one thing that might be helpful, especially to younger men that might participate in this class. If you get an inheritance, don't go out and spend it all on women and throw it away, and then you've got to come back home."*

Participant #7: *"Now that we have been studying this text, it really enlightens us on what going on around us. It reminds us of some of the bad situations people get in."*

Exit Interview for Participant #1

1. What were your initial thoughts coming into this program? *I had concerns about telling my business. I did not want people to know my business.*
2. What are your thoughts exiting the program? *I thought it was good. It gave me change to talk to people. I felt comfortable about discussing things I had on my mind, but did not have anyone to talk to about it.*

3. Was this program helpful in improving your understanding of biblical fatherhood? *Yes, because by listening, it helped me with my own situations.*
4. Do you feel you have gained anything from participating in this program? *Yes. I now have people I can share things with because we have discussed it in the program.*
5. Has this program been helpful in making positive changes in your life? *Yes. Sometimes it helps me to be more patient with the children. We talk about how many times we will allow him to come back home. Then I am able to explain to him why.*
6. During this program, did the information discussed come to mind when dealing with your children? *Yes.*
7. If this program were offered again, would you participate again? *Yes.*
8. Do you think there is a need for this program to be offered again? *Yes. I think there should be another one for the young people so they can get a better understanding.*
9. In your opinion, what would make this program better? *I think it is fine the way it is.*
10. Has this program been helpful in aiding you in your efforts to become a better father from a biblical perspective? *I guess. I thought I was already one. But I think so.*

Exit Interview for Participant #2

1. What were your initial thoughts coming into this program? *I was wondering what it would be about. I thought it would be a Bible class.*
2. What are your thoughts exiting the program? *I thought it was something needed and something that can help men.*
3. Was this program helpful in improving your understanding of biblical fatherhood? *Yes.*

4. Do you feel you have gained anything from participating in this program? *Definitely. It made me a little bit more aware of what a biblical father is and gave me some principles to put into place.*
5. Has this program been helpful in making positive changes in your life? *Yes. It made me aware of some things I may have been doing wrong that I have corrected.*
6. During this program, did the information discussed come to mind when dealing with your children? *Yes.*
7. If this program were offered again, would you participate again? *Yes, and let a lot of the other men know about it too.*
8. Do you think there is a need for this program to be offered again? *Yes. More men should be aware of how to become a biblical father.*
9. In your opinion, what would make this program better? *I guess if we had sort of an outline of what we discuss in the class.*
10. Has this program been helpful in aiding you in your efforts to become a better father from a biblical perspective? *Yes. It made me see and realize some things I can correct for myself.*

Exit Interview for Participant #3

1. What were your initial thoughts coming into this program? *I thought it would help me get closer to my son and stepson.*
2. What are your thoughts exiting the program? *It actually has helped me form a better relationship with my son and stepson.*
3. Was this program helpful in improving your understanding of biblical fatherhood? *Yes.*
4. Do you feel you have gained anything from participating in this program? *Yes. A lot of understanding in how to be a biblical father and communicate more with my son.*
5. Has this program been helpful in making positive changes in your life? *Yes.*

6. During this program, did the information discussed come to mind when dealing with your children? *Yes.*
7. If this program were offered again, would you participate again? *Yes.*
8. Do you think there is a need for this program to be offered again? *Yes. I would like to have another class because it was so helpful to me. Anything that is helpful is good.*
9. In your opinion, what would make this program better? *Get the kids to participate with the fathers so they can get an understanding of what a biblical father is. That would help our relationships with our children.*
10. Has this program been helpful in aiding you in your efforts to become a better father from a biblical perspective? *Yes. It has.*

Exit Interview for Participant #4

1. What were your initial thoughts coming into this program? *I did not think it would show us right and wrong in being a father.*
2. What are your thoughts exiting the program? *I think it was a good program. I lot of things my father did not tell me, I learned to do with my kids.*
3. Was this program helpful in improving your understanding of biblical fatherhood? *Yes.*
4. Do you feel you have gained anything from participating in this program? *Yes.*
5. Has this program been helpful in making positive changes in your life? *Yes.*
6. During this program, did the information discussed come to mind when dealing with your children? *Yes. Lot of things. Kids are not perfect. When they do something wrong, you stick with them and show them that you support them.*
7. If this program were offered again, would you participate again? *Yes.*

8. Do you think there is a need for this program to be offered again?
Yes. I really do because some fathers don't understand biblical fatherhood.
9. In your opinion, what would make this program better? *Have more people participating in the class.*
10. Has this program been helpful in aiding you in your efforts to become a better father from a biblical perspective? *Yes. I feel like fathers set an example for their children and they imitate the behavior and think it is right. The class helps to show certain things are not right that we do.*

Exit Interview for Participant #5

1. What were your initial thoughts coming into this program? *I thought it would be more questions and answers and lectures.*
2. What are your thoughts exiting the program? *It should be something that is done on a regular basis for all the men in the church.*
3. Was this program helpful in improving your understanding of biblical fatherhood? *Yes.*
4. Do you feel you have gained anything from participating in this program? *Yes.*
5. Has this program been helpful in making positive changes in your life? *Yes.*
6. During this program, did the information discussed come to mind when dealing with your children? *Yes.*
7. If this program were offered again, would you participate again? *Yes.*
8. Do you think there is a need for this program to be offered again? *Yes.*
9. In your opinion, what would make this program better? *More classes and different topics.*
10. Has this program been helpful in aiding you in your efforts to become a better father from a biblical perspective? *Yes.*

Exit Interview for Participant #6

1. What were your initial thoughts coming into this program? *I did not know what it would be like.*
2. What are your thoughts exiting the program? *It taught me some things I did not know that could help my kids and I at the house.*
3. Was this program helpful in improving your understanding of biblical fatherhood? *Yes. Tremendously.*
4. Do you feel you have gained anything from participating in this program? *Yes. At home I am more of a spiritual leader for my two stepsons.*
5. Has this program been helpful in making positive changes in your life? *Yes. I have made a lot of positive changes.*
6. During this program, did the information discussed come to mind when dealing with your children? *Yes. I talked to my son about some of the topics from the class. By me coming to a class like that, it made the relationship between my grandson and I stronger.*
7. If this program were offered again, would you participate again? *Yes. I most certainly would.*
8. Do you think there is a need for this program to be offered again? *Yes.*
9. In your opinion, what would make this program better? *More participation from the men in the church. Let them know how we enjoyed the program.*
10. Has this program been helpful in aiding you in your efforts to become a better father from a biblical perspective? *Yes it has. I don't have to argue as much with my grandson now. We sit down and talk.*

Exit Interview for Participant #7

1. What were your initial thoughts coming into this program? *I was wondering what we would talk about and discuss.*
2. What are your thoughts exiting the program? *I was really impressed with the program. It was very inspiring. It was very helpful in trying to learn how to better be a biblical father.*
3. Was this program helpful in improving your understanding of biblical fatherhood? *Yes.*
4. Do you feel you have gained anything from participating in this program? *Yes.*
5. Has this program been helpful in making positive changes in your life? *Yes.*
6. During this program, did the information discussed come to mind when dealing with your children? *Yes.*
7. If this program were offered again, would you participate again? *Yes*
8. Do you think there is a need for this program to be offered again? *Yes.*
9. In your opinion, what would make this program better? *Maybe more men to be a part of the group.*
10. Has this program been helpful in aiding you in your efforts to become a better father from a biblical perspective? *Yes. I have learned to be more patient, kind, and loving to my children.*

Based on the result of the field study, the African American fathers that participated in the study exhibited an increase in their understanding of fatherhood from a biblical perspective. This was achieved through choosing biblical texts that related directly to fatherhood, providing space for open dialogue and discussion, and a safe space for African American fathers to discuss similarities in their struggles. It appears these men were attracted to a ministry that is developed for men, about men, and actively

engages men through practical study of biblical texts that penetrate their existential reality.

APPENDIX A

PRE-SURVEY AND POST-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX A

PRE-SURVEY AND POST-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Please circle the number of the answer you agree with:

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Don't Know 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

1. I understand the basics of what biblical fatherhood is.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Who is the person in the Bible you believe adequately models what fatherhood should look like? One answer please.

3. Who was the person in your life that you believe modeled biblical fatherhood?

- a. Please give five characteristics that demonstrate biblical fatherhood.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

1. Being the strong silent type is a model biblical fatherhood.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Men who practice biblical fatherhood are looked at as wimps.

1 2 3 4 5

3. Do you believe in the old adage, "Do as I say and not as I do?"

1 2 3 4 5

4. Raising a daughter is primarily the mother's responsibility.

1 2 3 4 5

5. Raising the son is primarily the father's responsibility.

1 2 3 4 5

6. A father should not show his emotions.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Boys need less direction than girls.

1 2 3 4 5

8. How do you think a father should teach his children?

a. Through conversations

b. Through conversations and your own behavior

c. Through their own life experiences

9. The father's job is primarily to provide for the family and the mother's job is primarily to raise the children.

1 2 3 4 5

10. Fathers play an important and irreplaceable role in the lives of children.

1 2 3 4 5

11. I have a high level of satisfaction when it comes to fathering.

1 2 3 4 5

12. One of the most important factors facing America today, specifically the African American Family, is the absence of the father from the home.

1 2 3 4 5

13. Fathers influence their children either in a positive way or a negative way.

1 2 3 4 5

14. To be a biblical father you must spend time with your children.

1 2 3 4 5

15. Living in the house with your children and having a relationship with them is two different things.

1 2 3 4 5

16. You can live in the house with your children and not have a meaningful relationship with them.

1 2 3 4 5

17. Making money to pay the bills is more important than being home to spend time with the children.

1 2 3 4 5

18. My history affects my ability to be a good father.

1 2 3 4 5

19. Struggling to make it in this world makes it hard to be a good father.

1 2 3 4 5

20. Men are not meant to be with one woman for their entire lives.

1 2 3 4 5

21. Cheating is something that most men do; it's a part of our nature.

1 2 3 4 5

22. My job comes before my family, because I have to be able to provide for them.

1 2 3 4 5

23. I don't worry about children watching me; they know the difference between right and wrong.

1 2 3 4 5

24. The decisions my children make in their lives have little or nothing to do with me.

1 2 3 4 5

25. I realize that my children suffer because of how I live my life.

1 2 3 4 5

26. Some things my children do are a direct result of what they have watched me do in my life.

1 2 3 4 5

27. I don't plan on leaving my children an inheritance because nobody did it for me.

1 2 3 4 5

28. Once my children leave home they can't come back, they're grown, they have to fend for themselves.

1 2 3 4 5

29. I will never forgive my children for some things they have done to me.

1 2 3 4 5

30. I will help them as much as I can, but once they mess up, I'm done.

1 2 3 4 5

31. I tell my children I love them all the time.

1 2 3 4 5

32. I hug and embrace my children often.

1 2 3 4 5

33. My children can do no wrong.

1 2 3 4 5

34. I always let my children know when they have done something I consider wrong.

1 2 3 4 5

35. I try to teach my children integrity.

1 2 3 4 5

36. I try to help settle disagreements between siblings.

1 2 3 4 5

37. I see nothing wrong with showing favoritism between my children.

1 2 3 4 5

38. Jealousy between siblings is normal and harmless.

1 2 3 4 5

39. I talk with my children often.

1 2 3 4 5

40. I interact with my children's lives on a regular basis.

1 2 3 4 5

41. I pray for my children on a regular basis.

1 2 3 4 5

42. I believe in spoiling my children.

1 2 3 4 5

43. I believe in disciplining my children.

1 2 3 4 5

44. A father's job is to do the disciplining and the mother should handle everything else.

1 2 3 4 5

45. I make it a point to be as involved in my children's lives as I can.

1 2 3 4 5

46. My children would say that I am a great father.

1 2 3 4 5

47. My children would say that I do not understand what biblical fatherhood is.

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Developing A Transformative Model

Of African American Fatherhood From A Biblical Perspective

Participant #____

Age: ____

Marital Status: _____

Divorced? _____

Remarried? _____

Children: _____

Stepchildren: _____

Other children you assume a fatherly role with: _____

Did you grow up with your father in the home? _____

Did you grow up with a stepfather in the home? _____

Did you grow up in a single-parent home? _____

APPENDIX C
INDIVIDUAL EXIT INTERVIEW

APPENDIX C

INDIVIDUAL EXIT INTERVIEW

1. What were your initial thoughts coming into this program?

2. What are your thoughts exiting the program?

3. Was this program helpful in improving your understanding of biblical fatherhood?

4. Do you feel you have gained anything from participating in this program?

5. During this program, did the information discussed come to mind when dealing with your children?

6. If this program were offered again, would you participate again?

7. Do you think there is a need for this program to be offered again?

8. In your opinion, what would make this program better?

9. Has this program been helpful in aiding you in your efforts to become a better father from a biblical perspective?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT'S DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Developing A Transformative Model

Of African American Fatherhood From A Biblical Perspective

Participant # 1

Age: *46*

Marital Status: *Married*

Divorced? *Yes*

Remarried? *Yes*

Biological Children: *Four*

Stepchildren: *Two*

Other children you assume a fatherly role with: *No*

Did you grow up with your father in the home? *No*

Did you grow up with a stepfather in the home? *Yes*

Did you grow up in a single-parent home? *Yes. This individual spent time with mother, grandmother, aunt, aunt, and grandfather.*

Participant #2

Age: *61*

Marital Status: *Married*

Divorced? *No*

Remarried? *No*

Biological Children: *Two*

Stepchildren: *None*

Other children you assume a fatherly role with: *No*

Did you grow up with your father in the home? *Yes*

Did you grow up with a stepfather in the home? *No*

Did you grow up in a single-parent home? *No*

Participant #3

Age: *35*

Marital Status: *Married*

Divorced? *No*

Remarried? *No*

Biological Children: *One*

Stepchildren: *Two*

Other children you assume a fatherly role with: *No*

Did you grow up with your father in the home? *No*

Did you grow up with a stepfather in the home? *Yes*

Did you grow up in a single-parent home? *No*

Participant #4

Age: 63

Marital Status: *Married*

Divorced? *No*

Remarried? *No*

Biological Children: *Two*

Stepchildren: *Two*

Other children you assume a fatherly role with: *No*

Did you grow up with your father in the home? *Yes*

Did you grow up with a stepfather in the home? *No*

Did you grow up in a single-parent home? *No*

Participant #5

Age: 56

Marital Status: *Married*

Divorced? *No*

Remarried? *No*

Biological Children: *One*

Stepchildren: *One*

Other children you assume a fatherly role with: *Three*

Did you grow up with your father in the home? *No*

Did you grow up with a stepfather in the home? *No*

Did you grow up in a single-parent home? *No*

Participant #6

Age: 78

Marital Status: *Married*

Divorced? *Yes*

Remarried? *Yes*

Biological Children: *Five*

Stepchildren: *Three*

Other children you assume a fatherly role with: *Five*

Did you grow up with your father in the home? *No, Never knew his father.*

Did you grow up with a stepfather in the home? *Yes*

Did you grow up in a single-parent home? *No*

Participant #7

Age: 66

Marital Status: *Married*

Divorced? *Yes*

Remarried? *Yes*

Biological Children: *One*

Stepchildren: *Three*

Other children you assume a fatherly role with: *No*

Did you grow up with your father in the home? *No*

Did you grow up with a stepfather in the home? *Yes*

Did you grow up in a single-parent home? *Yes*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abogunrin, Samuel Oyin. *The International Bible Commentary*. Edited by William R. Farmer. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998.
- Ammerman, Nancy T., Jackson W. Carrol, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney. Eds. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Ancona, Frank. *Crisis In America: Father Absence*. Commack, New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 1998).
- Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation With Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- Bar-Efrat, Shimon. *The Jewish Study Bible-Second Samuel*. ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Birch, Bruce C., Walter Brueggemann, Terrence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen. *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. Nashville: Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Boothe, Demico, *Why Are So Many Black Men In Prison?* Nashville, Tennessee: Full Surface Publishing, 2007.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *First and Second Samuel*. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1990.
- Bryan, Mark. *The Prodigal Father: Reuniting Fathers With Their Children*. New York, New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997.
- Chen, Diane G., *God as Father in Luke-Acts*. ed. Hemchand Gossai, Vol. 92. New York, New York: Peter Lang, 2006.
- Coates, Delman. "Reaching Eutychus: Reflections On Ministering To The Disconnected In The Postmodern Age." In *Doing Church: A Practical Guide, By Those Who Do It*, edited by William D. Watley. Newark , New Jersey: New Seasons Press, 2010.
- Conner, Michael E. & Joseph L. White. *Black Fathers: An Invisible Presence In America*. Edited by Michael E. Conner & Joseph L. White. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2006.

- Craddock, Fred. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Edited by James Luther Mays. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1990.
- Crewell, John W., *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2007.
- Duke, Paul Simpson. *The Great Texts: A Preaching Commentary; The Parables*. Nashville, TN : Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Eldredge, John. *Wild At Heart: Discovering The Secret Of A Man's Soul*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.
- Farmer, William R., *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998.
- Fischer, David Hackett. *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*. New York, New York: HarperPerennial Publishers, 1970.
- Franklin, Robert M., *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting The American Crisis*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1997.
- Franklin, Robert M., *Crisis In The Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2007
- Hutchinson, Earl Ofari. *Black Fatherhood: The Guide To Male Parenting*. Los Angeles, California: Middle Passage Press, 1995.
- Jones, Gwilym H., *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Edited by John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- King, Mansa Bilal Mark A. *The Myth Of The Missing Black Father*. Edited by Roberta L. Coles & Charles Green. New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Kunjufu, Jawanza. *Adam! Where Are You?: Why Most Black Men Don't Go To Church*. Chicago, Illinois: Jawanza Kunjufu, 1994.
- Kunjufu, Jawanza. *Raising Black Boys*. Chicago, Illinois: African American Images, 2007.
- Kunjufu, Jawanza. *Restoring The Village, Values, And Commitment: Solutions For The Black Family*. Chicago, Illinois: African American Images, 1996.
- Losh, Susan Carol. *Guide 7: An Introduction To Less Structured Methods*, (May 12, 2009), <http://mailer.fsu.edu/~slosh/MethodsGuide7.html> (accessed September 2, 2010).

- Mack, Sir Walter, Jr. *Passion for your Kingdon Purpose*. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2004.
- McCarter Jr, P. Kyle. *1 and 2 Samuel*. Edited by Harold W. Attridge, San Francisco, California: HarperOne, 1989.
- McCarter Jr., P. Kyle. *The Harper Collins Study Bible*. Edited by Harold W. Attridge. New York, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006.
- McKenzie, Steven L., *King David: A Biography*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- McKenzie, Steven L., *King David: A Biography*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- McLaren, Brian. *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- Morrow, Alvin. *Breaking The Curse of Willie Lynch* (Florissant, Missouri: Rising Sun Publications, 2003).
- Peterson, Eugene. *First and Second Samuel*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.
- Phillips, John. *Exploring The Gospel of Luke: An Expository Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2005.
- Richards, Lawrence O., *Bible Teacher's Commentary*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications Ministries, 2004.
- Rohrbaugh, Richard L., *Jesus and His Parables: Interpreting The Parables of Jesus Today*. Edited by V. George Shillington. Edinburgh: T&T Clark LTD, 1997.
- Smith, William Charles. *The Church In The Life Of The Black Family*. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1985.
- Steussy, Marti J., *David: Biblical Portraits of Power*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999.
- Toler, Stan & Alan Nelson. *The Five Star Church: Serving God and His People With Excellence*. Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1999.
- Trochim, William M. K., *Qualitative Validity*, (October 20, 2006), <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualval.php> (accessed September 2, 2010).

- Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.
- Whitford, David M.. *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery*, Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2009.
- Widdicombe, Peter. *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Young, Brad H., *The Parables: Jewish Interpretation and Christian Interpretation*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.
- Youngblood, Ronald F., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.